Al-Mīzān

An Exegesis of the Qurʾan

ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī

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Edited by: Tawus Raja

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In the Name of God,
the Beneficent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to God, the Lord of the Worlds;
the Beneficent, the Merciful;
the Master of the Day of Judgment;
Thee only we serve, and to Thee alone we beseech
for help;
Guide us in the straight path;
The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed
favors,not of those against whom Thou art
wrathful, nor of those who are astray.

O' God! send Your blessings to the head of
Your messengers and the last of
Your prophets,
Muḥammad and his pure and cleansed progeny.
Also send Your blessings to all Your
prophets and envoys.

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Publisher's Note

In an effort to make the text more accessible to English-speaking readers, the editors have chosen to use English names for the prophets and figures (as listed below but not limited to) and to use Anglicized terms that now appear in English dictionaries.

Ādam	Adam	Mūsā	Moses
David	David	Sulaymān	Solomon
Aaron	Aaron	Shuʿayb	Jethro
Ibrāhīm	Abraham	Yaʿqūb	Jacob
ʿĪsā	Jesus	ʾAyyūb	Job
Isḥāq	Isaac	Yūshaʿ	Joshua
Ismāʿīl	Ishmael	Joseph	Joseph
Jibrāʾīl	Gabriel	Zakariyyā	Zachariah
Mary	Mary	ʿUzayr	Ezra

Arabic terms and names have been transliterated according to the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*).

For ease of reading, glyphs and traditional honorifics such as "peace be upon him" or (s.a.w.) which are commonly used as a gesture of respect after the name of the Prophet Muhammad, the Imams, or other sacred figures have been omitted from this text. No disrespect is intended, and may God's peace and blessings be upon them all!

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Arabic Transliteration Key

Arabic Letters	Transliteration	Arabic Letters	Transliteration
ا	ā	ع	ʿ
ب	b	غ	gh
ت	t	ف	f
ث	th	ق	q
ج	j	ك	k
ح	ḥ	ل	l
خ	kh	م	m
د	d	ن	n
ذ	dh	ه	h
ر	r	و	w/ū
ز	z	ى	y/ī
س	s	ء	ʾ
ش	sh	ة	-
ص	ṣ	ـَ	a
ض	ḍ	ـِ	i
ط	ṭ	ـُ	u
ظ	ẓ		

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Foreword

The current volume covers the last and 30th part (*juzʾ*) of the Qur'an, which is a suitable starting point for learning the Qur'an. To make the text more fluent and coherent, the technical linguistic discussions of the author have been moved to the footnote, and marked by (Auth.). Readers are strongly recommended to consult the foreword to volume 39, which elaborately explains how *al-Mīzān* is written, how it should be read, and how one can engage with the Qur'an effectively.

The first half of the volume—chapters 78-91, except 86—were translated by me, after consulting the work of Mohammad Mahdi Baghi. The second half—chapters 92-114, and 86—were translated by Dr. Amina Inloes, and edited by me to maintain coherence and consistency. Throughout the volume, my footnotes are marked by (Ed.). In the second half of the volume, a few footnotes by Amina Inloes are marked by (Trans.). While acknowledging the excellent work of the previous contributors, I bear full responsibility for any shortcomings in the current translation.

ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī had a special personal bond with Ḥāfiẓ and was very fond of his poems. Most readers are unaware of this mystical dimension of his soul because his discussions of Ḥāfiẓ were restricted to his private circles of select students. Here is a famous *ghazal* by Ḥāfiẓ which inspires us with hope. It is number 255 in his *Divan*. Though the alphabetical arrangement of the poems in his *Divan* were done posthumously, one can only wonder if this was one of the elegant subtleties that the crafty Khwājah intended to unfold later on, reflecting his devotion to the Mahdi (born in 255 AH).

The Joseph who's lost, to Canaan will come back;
Instead of sorrow, you'll have roses in your shack.
Be assured of that. Don't you worry. Rejoice!

Your heart will be happy, though with grief it's been fraught;
Your head will be calm, though today it's distraught.
Be assured of that. Don't you worry. Rejoice!

You shall live, my songbird, once again to sing
Under the umbrella of the flower, for near is the spring.
Be assured of that. Don't you worry. Rejoice!

You may not be favored for two days, but know:
The revolving firmament are always on the go.
Be assured of that. Don't you worry. Rejoice!

Do not despair when you don't know the unseen;
They're acting as well behind the scenes.
Be assured of that. Don't you worry. Rejoice!

If the flood of impermanence comes at you, do not fret;
You have Noah at the helm, so the storm isn't a threat.
Be assured of that. Don't you worry. Rejoice!

If you're yearning for the Kaʿbah, be ready to pass
A desert with thorns that wound and harass.
Be assured of that. Don't you worry. Rejoice!

The goal is very far and there are dangers on the way;
But there's an end to every path, despite the delay.
Be assured of that. Don't you worry. Rejoice!

Being far from the beloved, who's protected by a guard,
Is a condition that is patent to our Lord's regard.
Be assured of that. Don't you worry. Rejoice!

As long as you study the Qur'an and pray,
Alone in the night, O Ḥāfiẓ, that's the way.
Be assured of that. Don't you worry. Rejoice![1]

Our Lord, give us the fortitude to love those who hate us more than anyone else, for they are Your means of leading us to oneness. Grant us eyes to see our opponents as our own components. Bless us with the ability to transform their hostility to friendly flexibility, and tame their obstinance through persistent lenience. "I pray that whatever evil they have done / Will

1 Ḥāfiẓ, *ghazal* 255.

have its fruit of retribution ripen in me / And that this goodness which I practice / Will have its fruit of retribution ripen in them."[1] "Our Lord, we seek refuge in You from temptation in speech, as we seek refuge in You from practical breach. We seek refuge in You from taking up a load that we cannot carry, as we seek refuge in You from feeling proud about what we manage to carry. We seek refuge in You from spouting the absurd, as we seek refuge in You from being dumb and blurred."[2]

Tawus Raja
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1 Ārya Nāgārjuna, *A Strand of Dharma Jewels*, trans. B. Dharmamitra (Seattle: Kalavinka Press, 2009), p. 183.

2 Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa al-tabyīn* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1998), 1:3.

About the Author

The late Islamic scholar, thinker, and philosopher, ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī came from the celebrated Ṭabāṭabāʾī family of Tabriz. For the last three centuries, this family has produced generation after generation of renowned religious scholars in Azerbaijan (Iran). They are descendants of the second Imam, al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī (peace be on both of them). The clan is also referred to with the title, al-Qāḍī.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad b. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī. ʿAllāmah was born in Tabriz on 29 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1321/17 March 1904. His father died in 1330 (1912). The orphaned child grew up in Tabriz, and after completing his religious education there, around 1341 (1923), he went to Najaf (Iraq), the most important center of Shia religious learning.

In Najaf, he began his higher studies with such illustrious scholars as Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nāʾīnī al-Gharawī (1277–1355/1860 or 1861–1936), the son of Shaykh al-Islām ʿAbd al-Raḥīm, and Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī (1296–1361/1878–1942), the son of al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Ḥasan, Muʿīn al-Tujjār.

These two were among the most prominent scholars in the Shia world. They were among the most prominent scholars not only in the fields of Shia jurisprudence and principles of jurisprudence, but in all Islamic subjects. Their opinions and theories are still followed today. Each founded his own school of thought and trained thousands of Shia scholars and jurists; and all the *marājiʿ al-taqlīd*[1] of the Shia world, to this day, are their students. Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Gharawī al-Iṣfahānī was a philosopher, unsurpassed in his time; a man of literature; and a poet in Arabic and Persian; he was a genius whose achievements made others look up to him as their ideal. Shaykh Nāʾīnī, with his bold opinions and decrees in the political and social life of the Muslim *umma*, has carved for himself a niche in history.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was much influenced by these two teachers,

1 The highest authorities of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) whose rulings are followed by others.

particularly by al-Iṣfahānī, in the development of his thought and knowledge. A third influence was that of al-Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim Jaʿfar Khwānsārī (1313– 80/1895 or 1896–1961), the son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Mūsāwī, known as "the mathematician." ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was proud to have studied mathematics with him, and also wrote a book on higher mathematics, in which he applied some special theories of his teacher.

ʿAllāmah studied philosophy and metaphysics from al-Sayyid Ḥusayn al-Ḥusaynī Bādkūbahʾī; the latter was a student of al-Sayyid Riḍā, who studied with al-Sayyid Mūsā, a well-known teacher of philosophy and related subjects. In the fields of ethics and spirituality, ʿAllāmah received his training from his relatives, al-Sayyid ʿAlī al-Qāḍī (1285–1366/1869–1947), a well-known scholar who established a school of spiritual and ethical training which still flourishes today.

All these influences combined to create in ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī a well-balanced academic and spiritual personality. He was a well-respected authority on religious subjects of jurisprudence and its fundamentals; a philosopher of independent views and new theories; and an inspired model of ethical and spiritual perfection. He not only taught morality, but also lived it. Yet it is also correct to state that his scholarship was overshadowed by his fame and prestige as a philosopher and a spiritual man.

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī returned to Tabriz in 1353/1934, where he was welcomed as a religious scholar. There he spent his time teaching higher philosophy to willing disciples—but it was a small place for his talents. In 1364/1945 he migrated to Qum, the most important center of religious education in Iran. In Qum, he remained engaged in imparting the knowledge of ethics, philosophy, and the exegesis of the Qurʾan to those students who had already attained a high level of erudition. There he remained until his death on Sunday, 18 Muḥarram 1402/15 November 1981. May God bestow His mercy on him. Amen.

Many religious leaders of the present generation were and are among his students and disciples, the most famous being the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī (1338–99/1920–79).

ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī's fame rests on his academic works—the most important being his great exegesis of the Qurʾan, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān.* It is said to be the foundation stone of the academic prestige which ʿAllāmah al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī was accorded in the Muslim world.

Among his other works is *Uṣūl-i falsafah va ravish-i riʾalism* [Practical and Philosophical Principles of Realism]. This book is a comparative

study of Islamic philosophy and various modern anti-Islamic schools of thoughts, especially Marxism. His disciple, the late Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, annotated this work, thus making it easily accessible to the average man.

A third book, *Shiʿa dār Islām*, was first published in Persian; later it was published in English with the title, *Shiʾite Islam.* The ʿAllāmah wrote this book on the request of Professor Kenneth Morgan of Colgate University, to introduce Shiism to the West.

However, it is his *tafsīr, al-Mīzān* (published in 20 volumes in Arabic) which presents the true picture of the author's academic style and his way of thinking. In the preface to volume 1, the author outlines his plan, to explain the Qurʾan with the help of the Qurʾan itself. This he faithfully does, all the way through to the end of the *tafsīr*.

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Chapter 78

al-Naba (The Great News)

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Verses 1-16

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful.

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 40 verses. It affirms the occurrence of the Day of Judgment, discusses its attributes, and provides arguments for its undoubtable truth. It starts by narrating the audience's inquiry from each other concerning its news. It answers them, with a tone of admonition, that they will soon know. Then it proves its truth by referring to the order of the world before our eyes. The wise management of affairs in this world clearly shows that beyond this realm of constant change and impermanence, there must be a fixed and eternal realm. The signs in this world reveal that following this life where there is action but no compensation, there will be a life where there is compensation but no action.

The chapter then describes that day, when the people will be summoned and gathered in one place, when the transgressors will be doomed to excruciating punishment, and when the Godwary will be elevated to eternal bliss. Finally, the sūrah ends with an admonition. The chapter's theme clearly shows that it was revealed in Mecca.

عَمَّ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ ﴿١﴾

(78:1) *What is it about which* (ʿamma) *they question each other* (yatasāʾalūna, from tasāʾul)*?*

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There are two possible meanings for *tasāʾul*: (1) a group of people asking one another; (2) a group of people asking another person one after another. This shows that the audience were asking one another about something, or were asking the Prophet about it. The overriding tone of warning and admonition in these verses shows that those who were inquiring one

another were the polytheists in Mecca. The verses are about those who did not believe in prophethood and the hereafter. The verses are neither about the believers, nor about both the believers and disbelievers. The Qur'an reports this inquiry of the polytheists in the form of a rhetorical question which implies criticism and absurdity, because the answer to it is obvious. The matter is so evident that it is questionable why someone should inquire about it.[1]

عَنِ النَّبَإِ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٢﴾

(78:2) ***About the great news,***

This verse is a reply to the question in the last verse. It means: "They are questioning one another concerning the great news." The adjective *ʿaẓīm* (great, magnificent, immense) serves to glorify and emphasize the intensity and significance of this news. *The great news* here refers to resurrection and afterlife, which is a primary Qur'anic theme in the Meccan chapters, especially the earliest chapters that were revealed at the outset of the Prophet's mission (called *al-ʿatāʾiq*). This interpretation can be confirmed by the subsequent arguments for the truth of the Day of Judgment, and the description of the events on that day, notwithstanding the brevity of the chapter.

Here are two views concerning *the great news*:

(1) It refers to the news that is found in the Glorious Qur'an.

Comment: The context of the verses does not support this view, although that is also implied.

(2) It refers to all topics of controversy among the audience, including the existence of God, the divine attributes, the angels, the messengers, the resurrection, paradise and hell.

Comment: Apparently this view is based on the fact that all these aspects are incorporated in the true message of Islam, which can be deduced from the chapter. The problem with this view, however, is that all these aspects are implications of the resurrection, which comes with retribution for true and false beliefs, and for good and bad deeds. This

1 *ʿAmma* is an abbreviation of *ʿammā*, which is an elided form of *ʿan-mā* (about what, from which). The particle *mā* (what) is inquisitive. The letter *alif* at its end is omitted since it is preceded by a preposition (*ḥarf al-jarr*). The same kind of omission is seen in words like *li-ma* (for what), *mim-ma* (from what), *ʿalā-ma* (on what) and *ilā-ma* (to what). (Auth.)

would mean that the descriptions of the Day of Judgment in this chapter are a secondary and subordinate discussion.[1] Furthermore, as we said above, those who were questioning one another were the polytheists, who admitted the existence of the creator and the angels, but denied the other topics in the suggested view.

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الَّذِى هُمْ فِيهِ مُخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٣﴾

(78:3) ***the one about which they differ.***

The polytheists agreed on their denial of the resurrection, but differed regarding their basis for denial. Some of them rejected it on the account that it is impossible, as God narrates from them: *Shall we show you a man who will inform you [that] when you have been totally rent to pieces you will indeed have a new creation?* (34:7). Others rejected it based on finding it very unlikely, as they said: *Does he promise you that when you have died and become dust and bones you will indeed be raised [from the dead]? Far-fetched, far-fetched is what you are promised* (23:35-36). And some rejected it since they were uncertain about it, as reflected in the verse: *Do they comprehend the knowledge of the Hereafter? No, they are in doubt about it* (27:66). Finally, some of them were certain about its truth, but they opposed it defiantly and obstinately, just as they refused to believe in God's oneness, prophethood and other branches of religion despite having been proven for them. The Qur'an says: *Rather they persist in defiance and aversion* (67:21).

We can deduce from these three verses [78:1-3], and the following ones, that the polytheists were immensely affected by hearing the warnings of the Qur'an concerning the resurrection and retribution on the Day of Judgment. Thus they began going around and asking one another about this astonishing news, which they had not heard of until that day. Perhaps they also referred to the Prophet and the believers, asking them what that day will be like, and *When will this promise be fulfilled, should you be truthful?* (10:48, 21:38, 27:71, 34:29, 36:48, 67:25). They might have also gone to the People of the Book, especially the Jews, and asked them to help them understand the message of the Qur'an and the new religion. God narrates this story in the form of a dialogue. First it says, *What is it about which*

1 In other words, apparently the entire chapter is an elaboration of *the great news*, not a digression from it. (Ed.)

they question each other? (78:1), which questions their questioning. Then the verses answer what they are questioning about: *[Is it] about the great news, the one about which they differ* (77:2-3). Finally, the following verses respond to their dispute and inquiry: *Nay! They will soon know…* (77:4-5).

Exegetes have offered numerous views concerning the meanings of the terms in these verses [78:1-3] and how they are constructed. We shall not discuss them since they are not commensurate with the context of the verses. Our interpretation above is what can be deduced from the context.

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كَلاَّ سَيَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤﴾

(78:4) *Nay* (kallā)*! They will soon know!*

The word *kallā* (nay, never, by no means) implies a prohibition. The verse forbids their questioning, which had stemmed from their difference over their denial of the hereafter. The meaning is: "They must stop such an inquiry because soon the matter concerning this news will unveil itself to them and they will know it." The verse's expression implies a threat, much like the verse: *And the wrongdoers will soon know at what goal they will end up* (26:227).

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ثُمَّ كَلاَّ سَيَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٥﴾

(78:5) *Again, nay! They will soon know!*

This verse emphasizes and reiterates the prohibition and threat in the last verse. These verses [78:4-5] indicate that those who were questioning one another did not believe in the resurrection and retribution. They were neither the believers, nor the entire society including both the believers and the polytheists.

أَ لَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ مِهاداً ﴿٦﴾

(78:6) *Have We not made the earth a resting place,*

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This verse and the following eleven verses [up to verse 78:16] prove the occurrence of *the great news* (78:2), which is the resurrection and retribution. Once that is proven, it follows that: *They will soon know* (78:4-5). In other words, they will soon know the above mentioned forecast as they will witness the incident with their own eyes [upon the resurrection].

The argument in these verses [78:6-16] can be elaborated as follows:

We observe a robust and ordered universe that consists of the earth, the sky, the night, the day, and human beings which reproduce. It is impossible that such a fine and subtle system is a futile work that is made in vain and sport. Rather, beyond this impermanent and ever-changing world there must be a fixed and eternal system, where the outcome of righteousness and wrongdoing may manifest. Our pristine divine intuition (*fiṭrah*) commands us to conscientiousness and prohibits us from mischief. This world, however, lacks the capacity to reflect the felicity of the Godwary and the wretchedness of the mischievous. And it is not logical that God would inspire an inclination or disinclination in our pristine nature toward something that has no effect or reality in the world. This proves that there must be a day when the humans will be paid for their deeds: good reward for good deeds, and evil retribution for evil deeds. The argument in these verses can be compared to: *We did not create the sky and the earth and whatever is between them in vain. That is a conjecture of the faithless. So shame on the faithless for the fire! Shall We treat those who have faith and do righteous deeds like those who cause corruption on the earth? Shall We treat the Godwary like the wicked?* (38:27-28).

The conclusion of this argument is that there will be a day to be faced by humans, when they will be compensated for their deeds: if their deeds were good, then their compensation will be good; and if their deeds were evil, then their compensation will be evil. Therefore, the polytheists have no reason to disagree on this—where some would reject it as impossible, some would consider it to be unlikely, some would be undecided about it, and some would not believe in it defiantly despite knowing its truth. This day will inevitably occur, and there is no doubt in the upcoming retribution.

Some exegetes have interpreted the verses as offering another argument:

> The signs discussed in these verses prove God's omnipotence. Since the return is similar to the original creation, and since God had power over the original creation, it follows that He can return it a second time.

This argument is sound in and of itself, and is also found in other places in the Qur'an. However, it only proves the *possibility* of the return, not its definite *occurrence*. The theme and context of the current verses suggest that the latter is intended. Thus, the first argument that we offered is more coherent.

***Have We not made the earth a resting place* (mihādan):** This is a rhetorical question which implies a negation. *Mihād* means "a floor cover,

background, or place of settlement where one can act, manipulate and operate." It is also used for a carpet on which people sit. The meaning is: "We have indeed made the earth a place of peace for you, where you may be established and operate."

وَ الْجِبالَ أَوْتاداً ﴿٧﴾

(78:7) *and the mountains as stakes* (awtādan)*?*

Awtād is the plural of *watad*, which means "a thick nail," according to *Majmaʿ al-bayān*. Apparently the mountains are called stakes because most of the mountains on the earth are a result of volcanic eruptions which split the earth open. The ejected magma then solidifies in the form of a nail on the opening, rooted down toward the center of the earth. That is a means of settling the agitation of the underlying magma. Thus the mountains provide stability for the earth.

Some have suggested that the mountains are called stakes in the sense that they carry essential resources and benefits that make human life possible on the earth. Without them, the earth would not have been able to sustain human life. The problem with this interpretation is that it opts out of the apparent meaning of the text without any reason to necessitate a secondary meaning.

وَ خَلَقْناكُمْ أَزْواجاً ﴿٨﴾

(78:8) *And We have created you in pairs* (azwājan).

Azwāj is the plural of *zawj* (couple, pair), where each *zawj* consists of a male and a female. We created you in this manner so that you may procreate to sustain the human species, as long as God wills. Other suggested meanings are:

(1) *Azwāj* means *ashkāl* (forms, likes, molds). The meaning is: "You are all similar in shape to one another."
(2) *Azwāj* means *aṣnāf* (classes, divisions), referring to the various races such as white, black, red and yellow.
(3) Each person is made of two reproductive cells: the sperm and the ovum.

Comment: All of these are implausible views.

While the audience were treated in the third person in the previous verses, they are brought in and addressed in the second person in this

verse. It is said that this transition is to highlight the verse's decisive and irrefutable argument.

وَ جَعَلْنا نَوْمَكُمْ سُباتاً ﴿٩﴾

(78:9) ***And We have made your sleep for rest*** **(subātan).**

Subāt means "rest, comfort." Sleep causes our physical faculties to subside from their daily activities, and recuperate from the exhaustion and weariness that we earn through putting our body into work. Two other suggestions are:

(1) *Subāt* is synonymous with *qaṭ*ᶜ (severance, disconnection, detachment). Sleep cuts one off from their physical activities.

Comment: This meaning is close to our interpretation above.

(2) *Subāt* means "death" (*mawt*), because sleep is called death in the verse: *It is He who takes* (yatawaffākum, from tawaffī) *your souls at night* (6:60).

Comment: This is an unlikely interpretation. Verse 6:60 does not call sleep as *mawt* (death), but it calls it *tawaffī* (seizing, taking in full, grabbing). In fact, the Qur'an explicitly uses sleep in contradistinction with *mawt*: *Allah takes* (yatawaffá) *the souls at the time of their death* (mawtihā)*, and those who have not died in their sleep* (39:42).

وَ جَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ لِباساً ﴿١٠﴾

(78:10) ***And We have made the night a covering.***

The night covers visible things in its concealing darkness, just as the clothes cover the body. This is part of God's plan to make us stop our daily activities and occupations, retire to our homes and families, and settle down to rest

Some have suggested that the night is like a covering garment on the day, which can be taken off easily. The problem with this view should be clear.[1]

وَ جَعَلْنَا النَّهارَ مَعاشاً ﴿١١﴾

1 The interpretation is inconsistent with the previous verses, which all speak about things that are made in the service and benefit of humans. It is also clearly disharmonious with the next verse. (Ed.)

(78:11) ***And We have made the day for livelihood*** **(maʿāshan, from ʿaysh).**

According to al-Rāghib, *ʿaysh* is synonymous with *ḥayāh* (life), with the difference that it is used specifically for animal life. For instance, when talking about the life of God and the angels, the word *ḥayāh* is used, not *ʿaysh*. The word *maʿāsh* can serve three possible functions: (1) A *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund). (2) A temporal noun (*ism zamān*). (3) A locative noun (*ism makān*). What is meant here is either of the last two functions. The meaning is: "We have made the day a time or place for you to live; that is, to seek sustenance from the grace of your Lord." Some have favored the first function, where the verse would involve an omitted *muḍāf* (annexed noun, construct noun). The implied meaning would be: "We have made the day for *seeking and securing* your living."[1]

وَ بَنَيْنا فَوْقَكُمْ سَبْعاً شِداداً ﴿١٢﴾

(78:12) ***And We have built above you seven mighty [heavens].***

This verse describes the seven heavens which are firm and solid in construction.

وَ جَعَلْنا سِراجاً وَهَّاجاً ﴿١٣﴾

(78:13) ***And We have made a radiant*** **(wahhājan)** ***lamp.***

The adjective *wahhāj* means "very hot and bright." What is meant by *a radiant lamp* is the sun.

وَ أَنْزَلْنا مِنَ الْمُعْصِراتِ ماءً ثَجَّاجاً ﴿١٤﴾

(78:14) ***And We have sent down from (min) the rainy clouds*** **(al-muʿṣirāt)** ***abundant water*** **(thajjājan),**

The adjective *thajjāj* means "pouring, abundant." *Muʿṣirāt* means "rain-clouds." Some have interpreted it as "winds which condense the clouds to rain."[2]

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1 When used as a *maṣdar* (verbal noun, gerund), "living" does not mean "livelihood" or "sustenance," but it means "life." Nevertheless, the three functions of *maʿāsh* effectively reduce to the same meaning. (Ed.)

2 Based on this meaning, the preposition *min* (from, of) conveys the meaning

لِنُخْرِجَ بِهِ حَبًّا وَ نَباتاً ﴿١٥﴾

(78:15) ***that with it We may bring forth grains and plants,***

This verse covers the seeds and plants which feed both humans and other animals.

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وَ جَنَّاتٍ أَلْفافاً ﴿١٦﴾

(78:16) ***and luxuriant*** **(alfāfan)** ***gardens.***

The conjunction "and" joins this verse to *grains* (78:15). The verse describes gardens with intertwined (*multaffah*) trees. Some have said that *alfāf* is a plural noun that has no singular form.

Examining Narrations

(1) There are some narrations which interpret *the great news* (78:2) as Imam ʿAlī.

Author's comment: This is an esoteric layer of the verse [not its *tafsīr*].

(2) Once Abū Bakr told the Prophet, "You have aged [so quickly] O Messenger of God!" The Prophet replied, "Chapters 11 (Hūd), 56 (al-Wāqiʿah), 77 (al-Mursalāt) and 78 (*ʿamma yatasāʾalūna*) have made me age."[1]

(3) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *Have We not made the earth a resting place?* (78:6): It means humans are cradled, nurtured and fostered in it. *And the mountains as stakes?* (78:6): It means stakes of the earth.

(4) Imam ʿAlī said: He [God] pegged the earth's quiver with rocks.[2]

(5) Concerning *And We have made the night a covering* (78:10) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: It covers the day.

Author's comment: Perhaps what is meant is that the night conceals what the day reveals, and covers what the day unveils.

(6) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *And We have made a radiant lamp* (78:13): That is the shining sun. *And We have sent down from*

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of the letter *bāʾ* (by, through, with) [indicating causality and instrumentality]. (Auth.)

1 *Al-Khiṣāl*, on the authority of ʿIkrimah, on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās.

2 *Nahj al-balāghah*.

the rainy clouds (al-muᶜṣirāt) (78:14): It means from the clouds; *abundant* (thajjāj) *water* (78:14): It means pouring successively.

(7) Concerning the verse, *a year wherein the people will be granted relief and provided with rains* (yaᶜṣirūna) *therein* (12:49) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: "*Yaᶜṣirūna* means *yumṭirūna* (they will be rained)." Then he added: "Haven't you heard the verse: *And We have sent down from the rainy clouds* (al-muᶜṣirāt) *abundant water* (78:14)?"[1]

Author's comment: This means that the word in verse 12:49 should be *yuᶜṣarūna*, in the passive voice, meaning that it will rain upon them. The Imam's reference to the verse, *And We have sent down from the rainy clouds* (al-muᶜṣirāt) (78:14) shows that he interpreted *muᶜṣirāt* as *mumṭirāt* (rainy). The verbs *aᶜṣarat* is used for clouds, synonymously with the verb *amṭarat* (it rained).[2]

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1 *Tafsīr al-ᶜAyyāshī*. A similar hadith is narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq in *Tafsīr al-ᶜAyyāshī*, on the authority of ᶜAlī b. Maᶜmar, on the authority of his father. Another similar hadith is narrated from Imam ᶜAlī in *Tafsīr al-Qummī*.

2 The purport of the last two narrations is that verse 78:14 is about the clouds, not the winds. (Ed.)

Verses 17-40

These verses begin by describing the Day of Judgment, which was briefly pointed out in the verse: *Nay! They will soon know* (78:4). The verses then describe the fate of the transgressors and the rewards of the Godwary, and the chapter ends with an admonition as a conclusion of the discussion.

انَّ يَوْمَ الْفَصْلِ كانَ مِيقاتاً ﴿١٧﴾

(78:17) *Indeed* (inna) *the Day of Judgement* (al-faṣl) *is* (kāna) *the tryst* (mīqātan),

Majmaᶜ al-bayān says:

> *Mīqāt* means "a deadline or due date that is set for something." It is derived from *waqt* (time), just as *mīᶜād* (time or place of promise) is derived from *waᶜd* (promise), and *miqdār* (measured amount) is derived from *qadr* (measure).

The chapter began by informing the audience about the occurrence of *the great news* (78:2), and warning them by saying: *Nay! They will soon know* (78:4). Then the chapter provided a series of arguments for its occurrence in the verses: *Have We not made the earth a resting place…* (78:6-16). The current verse begins describing that great news. It is called a day of *faṣl* (separation, distinction, differentiation) in the sense that God's judgment on that day will separate the people. Each person will receive what they deserve by the virtue of their deeds. It is an appointed time (*mīqāt*) for the final judgment between the people. The verb *kāna* (was) is used in the past tense to indicate the inevitability and certainty of that day in God's primordial knowledge, as proven by the arguments in the previous verses. For the same reason, the verse is emphasized by the word *inna* (indeed, truly).

The meaning is: "It was in God's knowledge, when He created the heavens and the earth and ordained the governing order of the universe, that the day of decisive judgment will be an end point for this world." That is, God knew eternally that this world of creation will be incomplete unless it ends with a day of judgment, when all disputes will be settled.

يَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ فِي الصُّورِ فَتَأْتُونَ أَفْواجاً ﴿١٨﴾

(78:18) ***the day the Trumpet will be blown, and you will come in groups*** **(afwājan),**

We have repeatedly discussed the meaning of blowing into the Trumpet.[1] According to al-Rāghib, *afwāj* is the plural of *fawj*, which means "a group that is moving fast." The verse reverts to the second person that was employed to reiterate the previous warning in the verse: *Nay! They will soon know* (78:4). Apparently this verse relates to the verse: *The day We shall summon every group of people with their record.* (17:71).

وَ فُتِحَتِ السَّماءُ فَكانَتْ أَبْواباً ﴿١٩﴾

(78:19) ***and the heaven will be opened and become gates,***

This would connect the world of humans to the world of angels. Two suggested interpretations are:

(1) There is an omission in the verse. The implied meaning is: "It becomes *possessed with* gates" [where the word *dhāt* (possessing, having) is omitted].

(2) There will be paths that emerge in the heaven.

Comment: Both interpretations involve unwarranted impositions on the verse. The reader should reflect on this.

وَ سُيِّرَتِ الْجِبالُ فَكانَتْ سَراباً ﴿٢٠﴾

(78:20) ***and the mountains will be set moving and become a mirage*** **(sarāban).**

Sarāb (mirage) is an illusory pool of glittering water that appears to exist at a distance in a desert. It is used metaphorically for anything that is imagined to have some truth while it does not in reality. Apparently it is meant in its metaphorical sense in this verse.

Setting the mountains in motion and demolishing them will naturally result in their total disintegration and the loss of their form. This is mentioned in several places in the Qur'an, where it describes "the quake of the Hour" [22:1] and its aftermath, such as: *and the mountains move with an awful motion* (52:10); *and the earth and the mountains are lifted and*

1 See volume 30, pp. 244ff of the English translation, under verse 27:87; volume 13, p. 190, under verse 6:73; volume 27, p. 293, under verse 20:102; volume 29, p. 103, under verse 23:101. (Ed.)

levelled with a single leveling (69:14); *and the mountains will be like dunes of running sand* (73:14); *and the mountains will be like carded wool* (101:5); *and the mountains are ground to powder* (56:5); *and when the mountains are scattered [like dust]* (77:10). Based on these verses, setting the mountains in motion and pounding them will make them shatter, scatter, turn into running sand, and become like carded wool. However, this process is not congruent with the mountains turning into mirage, in the sense of appearing to be a pool of water that reflects light. This sense of mirage is not relevant here.

What is relevant is that the movement of the mountains will result in their annihilation. That is, they will lose their identity and existence *as mountains*. The mountains which appear to be stationary structures with a firm reality will transform—through being set in motion—into a mirage, meaning an empty label that is devoid of any reality. This can be compared to what God says concerning the nations that He obliterated and uprooted: *So We turned them into folktales* (34:19); *so We made them follow one another [to extinction] and We turned them into folktales* (23:44). Similarly, He says with regard to the false gods: *These are but names which you have coined—you and your fathers* (53:23).

Therefore, the current verse is similar to the verse: *And you see the mountains, which you suppose to be stationary, while they drift like passing clouds* (27:88), based on the assumption that this verse [27:88] is also about "the quake of the Hour."

إِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ كَانَتْ مِرْصاداً ﴿٢١﴾

(78:21) *Indeed hell lurks in ambush* (mirṣādan).

Al-Mufradāt says:

> *Raṣad* means "being alert on guard."
> *Marṣad* (lookout) means the position of *raṣad* (ambush, observation) as God says: *and lie in wait for them at every ambush* (marṣad) (9:5). *Mirṣād* is similar to *marṣad*, with the difference that it is used for a place that is specifically and deliberately meant for observation and watching. God says: *Indeed hell lurks in ambush* (78:21), implying that people will pass over it, as He says elsewhere: *There is none of you but will come to it* (19:71).

لِلطَّاغِينَ مَآباً ﴿٢٢﴾

(78:22) ***[It is] a resort*** **(maʾāban)** ***for the transgressors*** **(lil-ṭāghīn).**

Ṭāghūn are those who are characterized by *tughyān*, which means "violating and exceeding the limits." *Maʾāb* (place of return, end point) is a locative noun that is derived from *awb*, which means "return." The transgressors have made hell a place of resort and recourse for themselves [through their deeds]. That is why once they are cut off from this life, they will return and resort to it [as the place where they belong].

لابِثِينَ فِيها أَحْقاباً ﴿٢٣﴾

(78:23) ***Abiding therein for ages*** **(aḥqāb),**

Aḥqāb means "consecutive periods of time and long ages, without any specified limit." The verse suggests that *the transgressors* referred to in the last verse (78:22) are hostile and deliberate disbelievers. This can be confirmed by the subsequent verses: *Indeed they did not expect any reckoning. And they denied Our signs with such a denial* (78:27-28).

Some exegetes have interpreted "ages" (*aḥqāb*) in this verse as "one age after another." The meaning would be: "Hell will be a resort for the transgressors, who will be abiding there for one age after another, without any termination or limit." Hence, the verse does not contradict other verses which explicitly affirm the eternal abidance of the disbelievers in hell.

Another suggested view is that the next two verses—*they will taste in it neither…*(78:24-25)—qualify *ages* in this verse. The meaning would be: "They will abide therein for ages without tasting any coolness or any drink, except boiling water and pus. After that, they will undergo another set of circumstances, and this process continues indefinitely." This is a plausible interpretation, as long as it can be shown to be compatible with the context.

Aḥqāb is a plural noun, and there is a disagreement on its singular form. Here are some views about the term:

(1) *Aḥqāb* is the plural of *ḥuqb* or *ḥuqub*, as used in the verse: *or I spend a long time* (ḥuquban) (18:60).
(2) Both *aḥqāb* (78:23) and *ḥuqub* (18:60) are plural, where the singular of the former is *ḥaqb*, and the singular of the latter is *ḥiqbah*.
(3) Al-Rāghib says, "*Ḥiqbah* means an unspecified span of time."
(4) Each *ḥuqub* [or *ḥuqb*] is 80 or 80-odd years.
(5) Some have added that each of these years consists of 360 days, where each day equals 1,000 years [on the earth].

(6) Each *ḥuqub* [or *ḥuqb*] is 40 years.
(7) Each *ḥuqub* [or *ḥuqb*] is 70,000 years.

Comment: There is more to the list, but there is no evidence from the Qur'an to support any of these views. Nor are they established in the lexicons.

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لا يَذُوقُونَ فِيها بَرْداً وَ لا شَراباً ﴿٢٤﴾

(78:24) ***they will taste in it neither any coolness nor any drink,***

Given the verse's contradistinction between *coolness* and *drink*, apparently *coolness* means any means of cooling other than a drink, such as a shadow where one may rest. This would mean that "taste" (*dhawq*) is used in a general sense, meaning any form of enjoyment or access.

إِلاَّ حَمِيماً وَ غَسَّاقاً ﴿٢٥﴾

(78:25) ***except boiling water*** **(ḥamīman)** ***and pus*** **(ghassāghan).**

Ḥamīm means "scalding water." *Ghassāq* means "pus" that exudes from the dwellers of hell.

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جَزاءً وِفاقاً ﴿٢٦﴾

(78:26) ***[That is] a fitting*** **(wifāqan)** ***requital.***

This verse implies a perfect correspondence and correlation between one's requital and one's actions. This is because what motivates one to perform an act [voluntarily] is to reap its reward and consequence. Accordingly, being given the reward is the same as being given the action itself [because the two are identical]. Thus the Qur'an says: *O faithless ones! Do not make any excuses today. You are only being requited for what you used to do* (66:7).[1]

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1 *Wifāq* (lit. fitness, accordance) is a *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund). There are three possible interpretations for its usage here: (1) It serves as an *ism al-fāʿil* (nominative substantive, active participial noun). The meaning is: "Their requital will be *muwāfiq* (fitting, appropriate, proportionate) to their deeds." (2) There is an implied omission in the verse: "That is a requital that *has* fitness" [where the word *dhāt* (possessing, having) is omitted]. (3) A verbal noun is used instead of an adjective or an active participial noun for emphasis and exaggeration. This would be like the statement. "Zayd is justice" [implying that

إِنَّهُمْ كانُوا لا يَرْجُونَ حِساباً ﴿٢٧﴾ وَ كَذَّبُوا بِآياتِنا كِذَّاباً ﴿٢٨﴾

(78:27-28) ***Indeed they did not expect any reckoning. And they denied Our signs with such a denial*** **(kidhdhāban).**

The word *kidhdhāban* (78:28) is added to show surprise at their insistence in denial. These two verses explain and justify why their punishment will be fitting and in accord to their deeds. They did not anticipate the Day of Reckoning, had no hopes of the next life to come, and denied the signs which establish its truth. Thus they rejected monotheism and prophethood, and transgressed the limits of servitude by their acts. Since they disregarded God, God also disregarded them and deprived them of eternal bliss. Now what awaits them is nothing but wretchedness. What they shall find in the next world is only what is unpleasant to them, and will cause them torment. This is what God says below: *So [now] taste! We shall increase you in nothing but punishment* (78:30).

وَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْناهُ كِتاباً ﴿٢٩﴾

(78:29) ***And We have recorded*** **(aḥṣaynāhu, from iḥṣāʾ)** ***everything in a book*** **(kitāban).**

There are two possible interpretations for the word *kitāban* (a book, such a book): (1) It is the object *where* everything is recorded. The meaning is: "We have clearly recorded everything—including all actions—*in* a sublime book." This makes the verse comparable to the verse: *and We have recorded everything in a manifest register* (36:12). (2) It is a *ḥāl* (circumstantial qualifier, participial phrase) which describes the condition of *what* is figured. The meaning is: "We have recorded everything *while* it is written." In this case, the writing would be either in the Preserved Tablet or in the individual records of deeds.

It is permissible to interpret *iḥṣāʾ* (figuring, enumerating) as *kitābah* (writing) or vice versa, since both have a common element of recording and preserving. Therefore, the verse can be interpreted in two ways: (1) "We have recorded everything, such a recording." (2) "We have written everything, such a writing." Either way, the verse complements the justification in the last two verses. The meaning is: "Their requital is in accord with their deeds because they had the above mentioned qualities. And

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he is very just]. (Auth.)

since We have recorded all that, We shall compensate them in accordance."

فَذُوقُوا فَلَنْ نَزِيدَكُمْ إِلاَّ عَذاباً ﴿٣٠﴾

(78:30) *So [now] taste! We shall increase you in nothing but punishment!*

The letter *fā'* (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of this verse indicates that this statement is drawn as a conclusion to the elaborate account of their punishment in the previous verses. The verse's theme and message is to disappoint them from any hopes of being delivered from their doom, and tasting any comfort. The transition from the third person to the second person in this verse implies that they are considered to be present. Thus they are reprimanded and blamed directly.

… We shall increase you in nothing but punishment: This means that once you endure a punishment, what comes next is another punishment. You will undergo a series of torments heaping one on another. There will be a new punishment added to your previous one forever. Thus you should despair from ever tasting anything that you like and desire. This verse clarifies that what we read above—*Abiding therein for ages* (78:23)—implies eternal punishment without termination.

إِنَّ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ مَفازاً ﴿٣١﴾

(78:31) *Indeed such a triumph* (mafāzan, from fawz) *awaits the Godwary:*

According to al-Rāghib, *fawz* means "achieving good in security." This implies two elements: (i) deliverance from evil; (ii) attaining good.[1] There are two possible interpretations for *mafāz*: (1) It is a *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund).[2] (2) It is a locative noun.[3] The verse can convey either

1 While *falāḥ* (salvation, deliverance) and *fawz* (success, felicity, triumph) are synonymous, their difference is that the first term emphasizes the element of immunity from pain, but the latter emphasizes the element of enjoying pleasures. The former highlights the negative aspect, and the latter the positive. (Ed.)

2 The meaning would be: "The Godwary will have such a triumph and success." (Ed.)

3 The meaning would be: "The Godwary will be in such a place of triumph and success." (Ed.)

meaning.

حَدائِقَ وَ أَعْناباً ﴿٣٢﴾

(78:32) *gardens* (ḥadāʾiq) *and vineyards* (aʿnāban),

Ḥadāʾiq is the plural of *ḥadīqah*, which means "an enclosed orchard, a walled garden." *Aʿnāb* is the plural of *ʿinab* (grape), which is the fruit of vine. Sometimes it is used for the vine plant itself.

وَ كَواعِبَ أَتْراباً ﴿٣٣﴾

(78:33) *and buxom maidens* (kawāʿib) *of a like age* (atrāban),

Kawāʿib is the plural of *kāʿib*, which means "a young girl whose breasts have protruded slightly into a round shape." *Atrāb* is the plural of *tirb* (of the same age), which means "similar to another being."

وَ كَأْساً دِهاقاً ﴿٣٤﴾

(78:34) *and brimming* (dihāqan) *cups.*

Dihāq (fullness, repletion) is a *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund) which serves as an *ism al-fāʿil* (nominative substantive, active participial noun) here. It means "brimming with drink."

لا يَسْمَعُونَ فِيها لَغْواً وَ لا كِذَّاباً ﴿٣٥﴾

(78:35) *Therein they shall hear no vain talk nor any denial* (kidhdhāban).

In paradise they will not hear any vain or futile speech. Nor will any of them deny the speech of another one.[1] This means that their talk will be according to the truth, and will bear its intended effect.

جَزاءً مِنْ رَبِّكَ عَطاءً حِساباً ﴿٣٦﴾

(78:36) *[That is] a reward* (jazāʾan) *from your Lord, a bounty* (ʿaṭāʾan) *reckoned* (ḥisāban).

1 *Kidhdhāb* could also be an exaggerated form of *kadhib* (lie, lying), as understood by most translators. The meaning would be: "They will hear no pointless talk, let alone false speech." (Ed.)

There are three possible functions for the word *ʿaṭāʾan* (bounty, gift, grant): (1) It is a *ḥāl* (circumstantial qualifier, participial phrase) for *jazāʾan*, which is itself a *ḥāl* for an omitted verb. The implied meaning is: "What is done to the Godwary is done to them while being a reward from your Lord, while that is a measured bounty."[1] (2) It is a *tamyīz* (specification, discrimination, clarification) [for *ʿaṭāʾan*].[2] (3) It is an absolute object (*mafʿūl muṭlaq*) [for an omitted verb].[3]

It is said that the verse honors the Prophet by referring to God as *your Lord*. It is also part of the Qur'an's glorification of God that it does not ascribe the requital of the transgressors to Him [in verse 78:26]. The description of their retribution shows that they are the cause of their ill fate. The Qur'an says: *That is because of what your hands have sent ahead, and because Allah is not tyrannical to the servants* (3:182, 8:51).

The word *ḥisāb* (reckoning) appears both after the retribution of the transgressors [78:27], and after the reward of the Godwary [78:36]. This affirms the theme of *the Day of Judgment* (78:17) that was introduced previously.[4]

رَبِّ السَّماواتِ وَ الْأَرْضِ وَ ما بَيْنَهُمَا الرَّحْمنِ لا يَمْلِكُونَ مِنْهُ خِطاباً ﴿٣٧﴾

(78:37) ***The Lord of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them, the All-Merciful, Whom they will not be able to address.***

This verse interprets *your Lord* in the last verse. It clarifies that God's

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1 In simpler terms: "They receive this treatment as a reward from your Lord, as a bounty that is reckoned [or ample]." (Ed.)

2 The meaning would be: "They receive this as a reward from your Lord—that is, a reckoned [or ample] bounty." This would clarify that their reward is due to God's grace and bounty, and/or a result of reckoning their deeds. (Ed.)

3 The meaning would be: "They are granted this as a reward from your Lord: such a reckoned [or ample] grant." This emphasizes the significance and abundance of their reward. (Ed.)

4 The word *ḥisāb* (reckoned, fitting) is an adjective for *ʿaṭāʾ* (bounty, gift, grant). It is a *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund) which serves as an *ism al-mafʿūl* (accusative substantive, passive participial noun) here. (Auth.)
The author has interpreted *ḥisāb* (reckoning, measurement) as "measured, calculated, proportionate." It could also be interpreted as "sufficient, ample," as many translators have done. (Ed.)

Lordship encompasses everything in existence. *Your Lord*—that is, the Lord that the Prophet believes in and calls to—is the Lord of all things. This is contrary to what the polytheists believed: that every set of beings has its own lord, and God is the Lord of the lords—or He is the Lord of the heavens [only].[1]

Al-Raḥmān (the All-Merciful) is an intensified and exaggerated derivation from *raḥmah* (mercy, compassion). It is used here as an attribute of God's Lordship, meaning that His Lordship embraces everything with mercy. Hence, nothing is left out of His mercy unless that thing deprives itself from it due to its insufficiency and wrong choice. It is a sign of utmost wretchedness for the transgressors to have disqualified themselves from God's infinite mercy by opting out of His servitude.

… Whom they will not be able to address: The first part of the verse describes God with two qualities: (1) He is the Lord, which means that He directs the affairs of the creation. (2) He is the All-Merciful, which indicates His perpetual mercy. Given these two qualities, the final expression in the verse would pertain to the possibility of holding God accountable for His actions. His servants will not be able to ask Him, "Why did You do this?" or "Why did you not do that?" as we would ask one another. Hence, this statement—*Whom they will not be able to address*—is equivalent to the verse: *He is not questioned concerning what He does, but they are questioned* (21:23). We discussed its meaning under the verse.[2]

Meanwhile, to understand this expression accurately, we must interpret it in its full context, including the next verse: *On the day when the Spirit and the angels stand in an array* (78:38). The verse clearly shows that the clause, *they will not be able to address* (78:37) pertains to the Day of Judgment in particular. This can be confirmed by the previous context of the verses, which was an elaborate account of the punishments of the transgressors and the rewards of the Godwary, as a requital from God on the Day of Judgment. Therefore, what is meant [by *they will not be able to address* (78:37)] is that no one will have the right or ability to address God with respect to how He would compensate His servants. They can neither intercede for them, nor raise any objections to God's judgment.

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1 This is almost a verbatim translation of the *shema* in Judaism, as expressed in Deuteronomy 6:4. (Ed.)

2 See volume 28, pp. 39-46 of the English translation. Also see volume 15, pp. 70-80, under verses 7:10-25. (Ed.)

The angels (78:38) are also among those who *will not be able to address* (78:37). Nevertheless, they are free from objecting God, as the Qur'an says: *Rather they are [His] honored servants. They do not venture to speak ahead of Him, and they act by His command* (21:26-27). The same holds for *the Spirit* (78:38) because: (1) It is the speech and word of God (16:40). (2) God's *word is the truth* (6:73). (3) God Himself is *the Manifest Truth* (24:25). Evidently, the truth would not oppose or contradict the truth.[1]

Given the above discussion, what is meant by *address* in this verse (78:37) is intercession—or other similar means of saving one from evil, such as ransom, bargaining, friendship, supplication and petition. The Qur'an says: *before there comes a day on which there will be no bargaining, neither friendship, nor intercession* (2:254); *neither shall any ransom be accepted from it, nor shall any intercession benefit it* (2:123); *The day it comes, no one shall speak except by His leave* (11:105).

To summarize, the antecedent of the pronoun "they" is all beings who will be gathered on the Day of Judgment, including the angels, the Spirit, the humans and the jinn. This is commensurate with the theme of the verse, which is about the manifestation of God's glory and grandeur on that day. Some exegetes have suggested that the antecedent of the pronoun "they" is the transgressors. This is unlikely given the wide gap between their last mention and this verse. Nor is it the angels and the Spirit, since there was no previous mention of them. Finally, as we said above, what is meant by *address* is intercession and other similar means [of relief and deliverance].

يَوْمَ يَقُومُ الرُّوحُ وَ الْمَلائِكَةُ صَفًّا لا يَتَكَلَّمُونَ إِلاَّ مَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ الرَّحْمنُ وَ قالَ صَواباً ﴿٣٨﴾

(78:38) *On the day* (yawm) *when the Spirit and the angels stand in an array. They will not speak except whom the All-Merciful permits and who speaks right.*

The word *yawm* (On the day) identifies the time when *they will not be able…* (78:37). This interpretation is preferred to the suggested view that *yawm* identifies the time when *They will not speak* [in the current verse],

1 This is self-evident: the truth does not oppose itself. The author's point is that the Spirit would not raise any objection to God's command, for it is itself *of the command of my Lord* (17:85). (Ed.)

because a temporal container would primarily pertain to an event that is mentioned *before* it [not *after* it].

What is meant by *the Spirit* here is the being that is created through the divine command, as mentioned in the verse: *The Spirit is of the command of my lord* (17:85). Here are some other suggested interpretations for *the Spirit* in this verse:

(1) The higher orders of the angels.
(2) The guards of the angels.
(3) An angel who is in charge of all angels.

Comment: There is no evidence to support any of these views.

(4) Gabriel.
(5) The spirits of the people, which will *stand* alongside the angels between the first and the second blows of the Trumpet, before they enter their bodies [again].
(6) The Qur'an, which will *stand* in the sense that its teachings and predictions—about the felicity of the believers and the wretchedness of the disbelievers—will manifest and come into effect.

Comment: There is Qur'anic evidence for calling the last three items spirit (*rūḥ*). For instance, the Qur'an says [with reference to Gabriel]: *Brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit* (al-rūḥ al-amīn) (26:193); *Say, the Holy Spirit* (rūḥ al-qudus) *has brought it down* (16:102); *whereupon We sent to her Our Spirit* (rūḥanā) (19:17). And it says [concerning the human soul]: *I have breathed into him of My spirit* (rūḥī) (15:29, 38:72). And it says [about the Qur'an]: *Thus have We revealed to you the Spirit of Our command* (rūḥan min amrinā) (42:52). However, as one can see, in these verses the word *rūḥ* is always annexed or qualified with another term, but in the current verse it is used in an unqualified way. Moreover, the last two views involve an unwarranted imposition on the verse.

***… in an array* (ṣaffan)…:** This describes the condition of the angels and the Spirit [as they will stand]. The meaning is: "They will stand while they will be arraying." Given the juxtaposition of the Spirit with the angels, we may infer that the Spirit will be in one array, and all the angels will form another array.[1]

… They will not speak…: This statement interprets and elaborates what we read above: *Whom they will not be able to address* (78:37). Based on this

1 *Ṣaff* (array, arraying) is a *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund) which serves as an *ism al-fāʿil* (nominative substantive, active participial noun). (Auth.)

context, the pronoun "they" in the current verse refers to all beings that will be gathered, including the Spirit, the angels, the humans and the jinn. Two alternative views suggested by the exegetes are:

(1) The pronoun refers to the Spirit and the angels.

(2) It refers to the people.

Comment: The clause, *They will not speak* is used in the same context as *they will not be able* (78:37). And given our interpretation of that expression [*they will not be able to address* (78:37)], neither of these two meanings is plausible.[1]

… except whom the All-Merciful permits…: This phrase qualifies the pronoun "they" in the clause, *They will not speak*. It is meant to clarify that only those who are permitted by God will be able to speak on that day. This part of the verse has an unqualified meaning, which can be compared to the verse: *The day it comes, no one shall speak except by His leave* (11:105).

… and who speaks right* (ṣawāban)*: There is an implied omission here: "who speaks the right *speech*." *Ṣawāb* means "a truth that is not mixed by any falsehood or error." This phrase qualifies God's permission in the last part of the verse. The effective meaning is: "None shall speak except those whom the All-Merciful permits—and He would only permit those who speak what is right." This makes the verse comparable to the verse: *Those whom they invoke besides Him have no power of intercession, except those who are witness to the truth and who know [for whom to intercede]* (43:86).

Another suggested interpretation is: What is meant by *except whom…* are those who are *spoken about* [not the speakers], and what is meant by *right* is holding monotheistic beliefs—that is, acknowledging that "There is no god but God" (*lā ilāh illā Allāh*). The meaning is: "They will not speak in favor of anyone except one who meets two conditions: (1) The All-Merciful approves of the person being spoken about. (2) The person spoke right in this world, meaning that they were a monotheist and testified that there is no god but God." Hence, the verse is comparable to the verse: *and they do not intercede except for someone He approves of* (21:28).

This interpretation is not plausible because it implies that the verse allows speaking in general, but restricts whom can be spoken about. This

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1 The author's stance is in part based on taking *On the day* (78:38) to be a temporal container for *they will not be able* (78:37). Otherwise, the first suggested view is quite apparent and plausible because *On the day* can be a container for *They will not speak* in the same verse. (Ed.)

is not true, because the negation in these verses applies to any speech whatsoever on that day. Therefore, the exception would introduce those who are permitted to speak, not those who can be *spoken about*.

Discussion on the Meaning of Spirit in the Qur'an

The word spirit (*rūḥ*) has appeared repeatedly in the Qur'an. What springs first to the mind from this term is the life principle. However, this is neither restricted to humans, nor to animals. Rather, the Qur'an talks about other forms of spirit, as in these verses: *whereupon We sent to her Our Spirit* (19:17); *Thus have We revealed to you the Spirit of Our command* (42:52). Therefore, there are both human and non-human instances of the spirit.

The best Qur'anic definition for the spirit can be found in the verse: *They question you concerning the Spirit. Say, "The Spirit is of the command of my Lord"* (17:85). The spirit is mentioned in an unconditional form in this verse, and is described as being from [or of] God's command. Elsewhere God defines His command as follows: *All His command, when He wills something, is to say to it "Be," and it is. So immaculate is He in whose hand is the dominion of all things* (36:82-83). Therefore, God's command (*amr*) is the existentiating word of God.[1] Existentiation (*ījād*) is the existence (*wujūd*) of something in the sense that it is related to God, not in the sense that it is related to the apparent causes and instruments. It is based on this very criterion that God calls Prophet Jesus His word and spirit: *The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and His Word that He cast toward Mary and a spirit from Him* (4:171). This is because Mary conceived Jesus not through ordinary means. This idea is reflected in the verse: *Indeed the case of Jesus with Allah is like the case of Adam: He created him from dust, then said to him, "Be," and he was* (3:59).

In most verses, the word spirit is annexed or qualified with another term, such as: *I have breathed into him of My spirit* (15:29, 38:72); *and breathed into him of His Spirit* (32:9); *whereupon We sent to her Our Spirit* (19:17); *and a spirit from Him* (4:171); *and We supported him with the Holy Spirit* (2:87, 2:253). Yet, there are some instances where the word appears in an absolute form, without any qualification, such as: *In it the angels and the Spirit descend, by the leave of their Lord, with every command* (97:4). This verse apparently suggests that the Spirit is an ethereal being that is distinct

1 That is, God's command has the quality of giving existence to an event. It signifies a direct, immediate and non-temporal process of generation. (Ed.)

from the angels. The same idea can be drawn from the verse: *The angels and the Spirit ascend to Him on a day whose span is fifty thousand years* (70:4).

The Qur'an has three types of expression about the spirit in humankind: (1) There is a spirit which is found in all humans: *when I have breathed into him of* (min) *My spirit* (15:29, 38:72); *and breathed into him of* (min) *His Spirit* (32:9). The preposition *min* (of, from) indicates the source and origin where the spirit comes from. The verb used here is *nafkh* (blowing, breathing). (2) There is a spirit that is found in the believers specifically: *and He supported them with a spirit* (bi-rūḥ) *from Him* (58:22). The letter *bāʾ* (with, by) indicates causality. The verb used here is *taʾyīd* (supporting, strengthening). (3) There is a spirit which is found in the prophets exclusively: *and We supported him with the Holy Spirit* (2:87, 2:253). The verb used here is again *taʾyīd* (supporting, strengthening). This spirit is qualified by the term *qudus*, which means "holiness, purity, immaculateness."[1]

If we consider these verses in conjunction with the verse in Sūrah al-Qadr [97:4], we can deduce that the relation between these two spirits—that is, the qualified spirit in the above verses, and the unqualified spirit in Sūrah al-Qadr—is that of emanation to the emanator, or that of shadow to the body. Of course, the emanation and the casting of the shadow is by God's leave.[2]

In like manner, the spirit that is ascribed to the angels is an emanation or diffusion of the Spirit by God's leave. However, in the case of angels, the Qur'an does not use the verb *nafkh* (blowing, breathing) as it does in the case of humans. Instead, they are simply called spirit: *whereupon We sent to her Our Spirit* (19:17); *The Holy Spirit has brought it down* (16:102); *brought down by the trustworthy spirit* (26:193). This is because angels are purely spiritual beings, although they have their own range of proximity

1 Although "Holy Spirit" is perhaps the best translation for *rūḥ al-qudus*, it is not linguistically accurate since *qudus* is not an adjective for *rūḥ*. A more literal translation would be "Spirit of Sanctity." (Ed.)

2 In other words, there is a *causal* relation between them in its metaphysical sense. In the shadow metaphor, nothing is reduced from an object to form its shadow. Nor does an object gain anything as its shadow diminishes or disappears. Yet the shadow is tightly dependent on the object for its existence and appearance. In the same manner, the fragmented, particularized and qualified spirits are shadows and effects of the absolute Spirit, which is a transcendent and a temporal creation of God. This resembles the relationship between atman and Atman. (Ed.)

and distance to God. And if they appear with a body, that is only a *tamaththul* (appearance, resemblance, representation), as mentioned in the verse: *whereupon We sent to her Our Spirit and he became incarnate for her as a well-proportioned human* (19:17). We explained the meaning of *tamaththul* under that verse.[1] In the case of humans, however, it makes sense to talk about "the blowing of spirit" because they are composed of a lifeless body and a living soul. Thus the Qur'an says: *So when I have proportioned him and have breathed into him of My spirit* (15:29, 38:72).

These verses use "blowing" for the human spirit because human creation differs from that of the angels. Similarly, while the spirit is a source of life, there are several degrees of life. The different levels of life that manifest in a being are a basis for the usage of *nafkh* (blowing, breathing) or *taʾyīd* (supporting, strengthening) in the verses quoted above. In other words, there are different degrees of spirit according to the kind and intensity of life that ensues from it. For instance, one level of spirit is the spirit that is blown into all humans: *I have breathed into him of My spirit* (15:29, 38:72). Then there is another level of spirit, which support the believers: *and He supported them with a spirit from Him* (58:22). Compared to the universal spirit that is found in all humans, this spirit is at a superior existential position, has a higher rank, and has stronger effects. We can deduce this from the verse: *Is he who was lifeless, then We gave him life and provided him with a light by which he walks among the people, like one who dwells in a manifold darkness which he cannot leave?* (6:122). This verse considers a believer as having a light to walk with, and that is a result of their spirit [of faith]. A disbeliever, on the contrary, is deemed to be dead, even though they possess the blown spirit [of all humans]. Hence, it follows that the believers have a certain kind of spirit—with its special effects—which the disbelievers lack.[2]

Based on this analysis, we can say that there is also a degree of spirit

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1 See volume 27, pp. 45ff of the English translation. (Ed.)

2 In other words, the spirit is a "graded" being, much like light which comes in different intensities and frequencies across a wide spectrum. Believers have a spirit of a higher intensity (more luminous light), while disbelievers have a spirit of lower intensity (less luminous). Ultimately, all are rays of *the Light of the heavens and the earth* (24:35), but they differ in terms of their proximity and distance from that Colorless Source. Some spirits are more diluted and veiled from the Absolute due to engagement and immersion in the particulars. Otherwise, every living being has only one life principle (one spirit). (Ed.)

which is found in plants, since they too have some share of life. We can infer this from verses which talk about the revivification of the earth after its death.[1]

Another level of spirit is that which supports the prophets: *and We supported him with the Holy Spirit* (2:87, 2:253). The theme and context of these verses indicate that this spirit is at a higher degree than the other types of spirit found in humans.

Another sense of spirit is mentioned in these verses: *He casts the Spirit of His command upon whomever of His servants that He wills, that he may warn [people] of the Day of Encounter* (40:15); *Thus have We revealed to you the Spirit of Our command* (42:52). The Spirit in these verses can be matched with either the spirit of faith [in all believers] or the Holy Spirit [in the prophets]. God knows best. We had some useful discussions pertaining to this topic under the verses quoted here.[2]

ذٰلِكَ الْيَوْمُ الْحَقُّ فَمَنْ شاءَ اتَّخَذَ إِلى رَبِّهِ مَآباً ﴿٣٩﴾

(78:39) *That* (dhālika) *is the day of truth. So let anyone who wills take resort with his Lord.*

The demonstrative pronoun "that" (*dhālika*) refers to the Day of Judgment, which was mentioned in the chapter [78:17] and discussed thoroughly. The word *dhālika* is used for objects at a distance. Its usage here indicates the immensity and magnificence of that day. The day is *ḥaqq* (true, truth), meaning that its occurrence is certain and inevitable.

That is the day of truth…: This sentence marks the ending of the chapter and wraps up the discussion by referring back to its beginning.

… So let anyone who wills take resort (*ma'āb*) with his Lord: *Ma'āb* is synonymous with *marja'* (place of return). One should seek a point of return with one's Lord, where they will attain the reward of the Godwary, and will be secure from the punishments of the transgressors. This sentence is a conclusion that is made from the previous discussion about the

1 See verses 2:164, 16:65, 29:63, 30:19, 30:24, 30:50, 35:9, 36:33, 41:39, 45:5, 57:17. (Ed.)

2 See volume 14, pp. 144ff of the English translation, under verse 6:122; volume 25, pp. 266ff, under verse 17:85. (Ed.)

Day of Judgment, the proofs for its occurrence, and its description. The meaning is: "Given what We said, now whoever wishes to return to his Lord, let them do so."

إِنَّا أَنْذَرْناكُمْ عَذاباً قَرِيباً يَوْمَ يَنْظُرُ الْمَرْءُ ما قَدَّمَتْ يَداهُ وَ يَقُولُ الْكافِرُ يا لَيْتَنِي كُنْتُ تُراباً ﴿٤٠﴾

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(78:40) ***Indeed We have warned you of a punishment near at hand—the day when man will observe what his hands have sent ahead, and the faithless one will say, "I wish I were dust!"***

The *punishment* mentioned in this verse is the punishment in the hereafter. It is *near at hand* in the sense that it is inevitable and there is no doubt about its occurrence. "Anything that is bound to come is [practically] near."[1] Moreover, the deeds for which one will be requited are currently *with* the person and most closely tied to them.

… the day when man will observe what his hands have sent ahead…: One will anticipate the consequence of the deeds that they have acquired with their hands and sent ahead [for themselves]. Another suggested meaning is: "One will see the deeds that they have sent ahead as actions will appear before their doer," as God says: *The day when every soul will find present whatever good it has done; and as to whatever evil it has done* (3:30).

… and the faithless one will say, "I wish I were dust!": The intensity of that day will make the disbeliever wish that they were dust. Had they been devoid of intelligence and will like dust, acting [out of volition] and meting the consequences of those actions would not be applicable to them.

Examining Narrations

(1) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *and the heaven will be opened and become gates* (78:19): The gates of paradise will open. *And the mountains will be set moving and become a mirage* (78:20): The mountains will become similar to mirages which shine in the deserts.

(2) Concerning *Abiding therein for ages* (aḥqāban) (78:23) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *Aḥqāb* means several years. *Ḥuqub* [or *ḥuqb*] is

1 This is a famous Prophetic narration and proverb that is reported in several Sunni and Shia sources. See hadith number 4 under verses 76:23-31. (Ed.)

one year—a year which equals 360 days, where each day *is like a thousand years of your reckoning* (22:47).

(3) The Messenger of God said: Anyone who enters the fire will not come out unless they abide there for at least *aḥqāb*. Every *ḥuqub* [or *ḥuqb*] is 60-odd years, where every year consists of 360 days, and each day *is like a thousand years of your reckoning* (22:47). Hence, let no one rely on the idea of [eventually] coming out of the fire.[1]

(4) The Messenger of God said: A *ḥuqub* [or *ḥuqb*] is 40 years.[2]

(5) Once Imam al-Bāqir was asked about verse 78:23. He replied: This verse is about those who will leave hell [eventually].[3]

(6) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *Indeed such a triumph* (mafāzan) *awaits the Godwary* (78:31): It means they will triumph (*yafūzūna*). *And buxom maidens of a like age* (78:33): There will be damsels (*jawār*)[4] of similar age for the inhabitants of paradise.[5]

(7) Imam al-Bāqir said concerning *Indeed such a triumph* (mafāzan) *awaits the Godwary* (78:31): It [*mafāz*] means noble graces and blessings [from God] (*karāmāt*). *And buxom maidens of a like age* (78:33): It means young damsels with rounded breasts.[6]

(8) The Prophet said: "The Spirit is one of the hosts of God. They are not angels. They have heads, hands and feet." Then he recited the verse: *On the day when the Spirit and the angels stand in an array* (78:38) and added: "This [the Spirit] will be a host, and they [the angels] will be another host."[7]

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Nāfiʿ, on the authority of Ibn ʿUmar. The same hadith is narrated in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, with 80 instead of 60, and at the end it says: "Ibn ʿUmar said: Hence, let no one rely…"

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of al-ʿAyyāshī, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ḥumrān. A similar account is narrated on the authority of al-Aḥwal.

4 This is the plural of *jāriyah*, which can mean either a girl, or a bond maid. Apparently what is meant here is that they will be young, and/or virgin. (Ed.)

5 Another possible, though less likely, interpretation is: "They will be similar in age *to* the inhabitants of paradise." (Ed.)

6 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

7 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Abū al-Shaykh's

Author's comment: In our previous discussions about the Spirit, we quoted a hadith saying that the Spirit is a creature which is greater than Gabriel and Michael. We also quoted a hadith where Imam ᶜAlī argues that the Spirit is different from the angels based on the verse: *He sends down the angels with the Spirit of His command to whomever of His servants He wills* (16:2).[1]

(9) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: The Spirit is an angel that is greater than Gabriel and Michael. It was with the Messenger of God, and has been with the Imams.[2]

Author's comment: Perhaps what is meant by "angel" in this hadith is a celestial being in general. Another possibility is that the word was added later by some transmitters who were concerned with only the gist of the hadith. There is no evidence to hold that angels are the only celestial beings—which are created by God's command [immediately, and not through a gradual process]. Rather, there is evidence to the contrary, as we can deduce from God's speech to Iblīs when he refused to prostrate before Adam unlike all angels: *O Iblīs! What keeps you from prostrating before that which I have created with My [own] two hands? Are you arrogant, or are you [one] of the exalted ones?* (38:75). We discussed this point under the verse.

(10) Muḥammad b. Fuḍayl said: I mentioned the verse, *On the day when the Spirit and the angels stand in an array* (78:38). Imam al-Kāẓim said, "By God! We [Ahl al-Bayt] are those who will be permitted to speak and those who speak right."
"What will you say when you speak?" I asked.
"We will glorify our Lord," he said, "will send peace upon our Prophet, and we will intercede [with God] for our followers. And our Lord will not turn us down…"[3]

Author's comment: This hadith offers some examples and applications of the verse. Otherwise, there will also be other intercessors on that day who will be permitted to speak, such as the angels, the prophets and the

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al-ᶜAẓamah, and Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Ibn ᶜAbbās.

1 See volume 25, p. 291 of the English translation. Also see the author's exposition and examination of narrations under verse 16:2. (Ed.)

2 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Baṣīr.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration. This is also narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq, on the authority of Muᶜāwiyah b. ᶜAmmār, in *Majmaᶜ al-bayān,* on the authority of al-ᶜAyyāshī, via an unconnected chain of transmission (*marfūᶜ*).

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believers. There will also be witnesses from various nations who will have permission to speak, as mentioned explicitly in the Qur'an and hadith.

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Chapter 79

al-Nāziʿāt (Those Who Pull Out)

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Verses 1-41

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful.

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 46 verses. It emphasizes the truth of afterlife and the reality of resurrection. It provides arguments for it based on God's direction of affairs, concluding that the people will be classified into the inhabitants of paradise and the dwellers of hell. The chapter closes by addressing their question about the time of the Hour, and the reply to that. The theme of the verses shows that the sūrah was revealed in Mecca.

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وَ النَّازِعاتِ غَرْقاً ﴿١﴾

(79:1) ***By those who pull out fully!***

There is a wide disagreement among the exegetes concerning the meaning of the first five verses of this chapter. However, they are unanimous that these are vows with an omitted complement. The implied meaning is: "I swear by these things that you shall be resurrected."

By those who pull out **(al-nāziʿāt)** ***fully*** **(gharqan)*:*** Here are some suggested interpretations for what is being sworn by in this verse:[1]

(1) The angels of death, who drag out (*tanziʿu*) the souls from the bodies. *Gharq* (immersion, inundation, drowning) is a *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund) which implies emphasis here, since it is mentioned without any qualification. The implied meaning is "seizing with severity" or "pulling out in fullness" [where "seizing"

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1 The author will later reject all of these because of being discordant with verse 79:5. Given the uniformity of context, he interprets the first five verses as stages involved in the angels' mission to direct the affairs of the world. (Ed.)

and "pulling out" are omitted].

(2) The angels who specifically pull out (*yanziʿūna*) the souls of disbelievers from their bodies vehemently.

(3) Death, which fully wrests (*yanziʿu*) the souls out of the bodies.

(4) The stars, which are drawn (*tanziʿu*) from one horizon to hide in another. That is, they rise from their rising points, and set in their setting points.

(5) The bows, which are pulled (*tanziʿu*) with the arrow. They are fully stretched when the bowstring is pulled. Hence, the verse swears by the bows of the soldiers in the way of God, or by the soldiers themselves.[1]

(6) The beasts, which are drawn (*tanziʿu*) toward the pastures.

وَ النَّاشِطاتِ نَشْطاً ﴿٢﴾

(79:2) *By those who discharge gently* (nashṭan)*!*

There are a few meanings for *nashṭ*: (i) to pull and absorb with ease; (ii) to come out gently [intransitive]; (iii) to bring out gently [transitive]; (iv) to untie a knot. Here are some suggested interpretations for what is being sworn by in this verse:

(1) The angels who draw the souls out of the bodies.

(2) The angels who specifically draw the souls of the believers out of their bodies, just as the last verse—*By those who pull out fully* (79:1)—was about the angels who pull out the souls of the disbelievers from their bodies.

(3) The angels who pull out (*yanshiṭūna*) the souls of the disbelievers from their bodies [by force].

(4) The very souls of the believers.[2]

(5) The stars, which exit (*tanshiṭu*) and move from one horizon to another.

(6) The arrows, which leave (*tanshiṭu*) the bows in battles.

(7) Death, which brings out (*yanshiṭu*) the souls from the bodies.

(8) The beasts, which move out (*tanshiṭu*) from one region to another.

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1 The bows are pulled; the soldiers pull. The former is the object of pulling; the latter is the subject. (Ed.)

2 This is based on the intransitive usage of *nashṭ*. The souls of the believers *come out* with ease. (Ed.)

وَ السَّابِحاتِ سَبْحاً ﴿٣﴾

(79:3) ***By those who sweep swiftly*** **(sabḥan)*!***

Here are some suggested interpretations for what is being sworn by in this verse:

(1) The angels who seize the souls, whereby they hasten with a believer's soul to paradise, and with a disbeliever's soul to hell. *Sabḥ* means "moving quickly." A fast horse is called *sābiḥ*.
(2) The angels who gently draw out the souls of the believers from their bodies, and then leave them to rest, much like someone or something that is [smoothly] set afloat and buoyant (*sābiḥ*) on water.
(3) The angels who descend from the sky quickly.
(4) The stars, which float (*tasbaḥu*) in their orbits, as the Qur'an says: *each swimming in an orbit* (21:33, 36:40).
(5) The horses of the soldiers, which move swiftly (*tasbaḥu*) as they gallop [in God's way].
(6) Deaths,[1] which flow swiftly (*tasbaḥu*) in the fluid souls of all animals.
(7) The ships, which float (*tasbaḥu*) in the seas.
(8) The clouds [which float in the sky].
(9) Sea animals.

فَالسَّابِقاتِ سَبْقاً ﴿٤﴾

(79:4) ***By those who hasten with haste*** **(sabqan)*!***

Here are some suggested interpretations for what is being sworn by in this verse:

(1) The angels in general, since they surpass (*sabaqat*) humans in virtue, faith, and righteous deeds.
(2) The angels of death, who quickly lead (*tasbiqu*) the souls of the believers to paradise, and the souls of the disbelievers to hell.
(3) The angels who specifically seize the souls of the believers and quickly lead (*tasbiqu*) them to paradise.

1 This is in the plural in accordance with the verse. What is meant is different ways of dying, or the many factors that can lead to death. The same applies to the last interpretation under the next verse. (Ed.)

(4) The angels of revelation, who outstrip (*tasbiqu*) the devils as they convey God's revelation to the prophets.
(5) The souls of the believers. Since their souls are longing to meet God, they hasten (*tasbiqu*) toward the angels that seize them [upon death].
(6) The stars, which surpass (*tasbiqu*) one another.
(7) The horses of soldiers, which outstrip (*tasbiqu*) one another in a battle [in God's way].
(8) The deaths, which surpass (*tasbiqu*) the hopes and ambitions of people.

فَالْمُدَبِّرَاتِ أَمْراً ۝٥

(79:5) ***By those who direct the affairs!***

Here are some suggested interpretations for what is being sworn by in this verse:

(1) The angels in general, since they direct the affairs [of the universe]. This is how most exegetes have interpreted the verse. Some have claimed that there is a consensus among the exegetes about this.
(2) The four archangels who are in charge of directing the affairs of this world, including Gabriel, Michael, ʿIzrāʾīl, and Isrāfīl. Gabriel is in charge of the winds, the hosts [in battles], and divine revelation. Michael is in charge of rain and plants. ʿIzrāʾīl [the Angel of Death] is charged with seizing the souls [upon death]. Isrāfīl [Seraphiel] brings down the divine command to them [the other three archangels], and is the blower of the Trumpet [upon the resurrection].
(3) The firmament, upon which God's command descends. The divine decree governs the world through their channel.

Some exegetes have said that there is an omitted *muḍāf* (annexed noun, construct noun) in the above vows, where the implied meaning is: "By the Lord of those who pull out… By the Lord of…"

It should be noted that these five verses [79:1-5] follow the same context and have a uniform flow. This refutes many of the above mentioned interpretations, which imply varying objects of vow by which the verses swear. Some examples of such discordant views are:

(1) Interpreting *al-nāziʿāt* (79:1) as angels that pull out the souls of the disbelievers.

(2) Interpreting *al-nāshiṭāṭ* (79:2) as the beasts.
(3) Interpreting *al-sābiḥāt* (79:3) as the ships.
(4) Interpreting *al-sābiqāt* (79:4) as deaths which surpass the hopes and ambitions of people.
(5) Interpreting *al-mudabbirāt* (79:5) as the firmaments.

Besides, there is no evidence from the context[1] of the verses to support many of the above interpretations. They are merely based on dictionary usages of the terms, whether literal or metaphorical. Furthermore, many of these suggestions are incompatible with the theme of the chapter, which revolves around the Day of Resurrection, and provides arguments for its occurrence. As we discussed in Sūrah al-Mursalāt, there is always a connection between the Qur'anic oaths and their intended message.[2]

What one could say—and God knows best—is that the descriptions mentioned in these verses can be matched with the attributes of the angels. They obey the commands of the Almighty God with respect to managing the affairs of the visible world, and they execute this with His leave. These verses bear a striking resemblance to the opening verses of Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt and Sūrah al-Mursalāt: *By those ranged in ranks! By the ones who drive vigorously! By those who recite the reminder* (37:1-3); *By those released successively! By the tempestuous tempests! By the spreaders spreading! By the separators separating! By the inspirers of remembrance* (77:1-5). All these chapters describe the angels that obey God's command. The difference is that the other two chapters pertain to the angels of revelation, while this chapter is concerned with angels in general, as agents who direct the affairs of the world, under God's authority.

***By those who direct* (fal-mudabbirāt, from tadbīr) *the affairs* (amran):** Among these five verses [79:1-5], this verse most evidently corresponds to the angels. Since *tadbīr* (direction, management, government) is mentioned in an unqualified way, it indicates the management of the world in an absolute sense. Such absolute direction only befits the angels. Hence, what is meant by the clause, *those who direct* is angels in general. There are two possible interpretations for the word *amran* (affair, command):

1 This clearly shows the author's method in *tafsīr*. A verse is to be understood in its context, based on the assumption that its surrounding verses pursue the same theme. (Ed.)

2 See the section titled "Discussion on God's Vows in the Qur'an" above, after verse 77:7. (Ed.)

(1) It is a *tamyīz* (specification, discrimination, clarification).[1] (2) It is the object of direction.[2]

The letter *fā*ʾ (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of this verse indicates that their direction of affairs is a result and consequence of their quality of hastening and taking the lead, mentioned in the previous verse. Similarly, the letter *fā*ʾ at the beginning of the verse, *By those who hasten* (fal-sābiqāt) *with haste* (79:4) indicates that this quality is a result and consequence of their swift floating [79:3]. Therefore, there is a harmony and congruity in the meaning of these three verses: *By those who sweep swiftly! By those who hasten with haste! By those who direct the affairs* (79:3-5). It means that the angels first descend [with the divine command] through a swift float [79:3], then they race toward their mission [79:4], and then they direct the affairs with which they are charged [79:5]. Based on this analysis, we can conclude that *those who sweep* (79:3) and *those who hasten* (79:4) are the same as *those who direct* (79:5). All these verses refer to the angels in the sense that they descend to direct an affair that they are commanded to.[3]

These three verses [79:3-5] correspond to the verse: *He has guardian angels, to his front and his rear, who guard him by Allah's command* (13:11), based on our interpretation of the verse. Anything in the world is subject to a number of opposing causes and factors which contribute to its existence, nonexistence, persistence or annihilation. But the angels descend upon it to settle its fate. When God ordains some matter, and finalizes His decree about some event, the angel who is charged with it hastens toward it with its specified mandate in those circumstances. That angel surpasses the other angels and completes the cause that has been ordained.[4] This is how God's will is executed. The reader should reflect on his.

Therefore, we can safely say that these three verses [79:3-5] pertain to the swift descent of the angels to fulfil their mission, whereby they hasten

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1 The meaning would be: "By those who direct—that is, they direct the affairs." (Ed.)

2 The meaning would be: "By those who direct the affairs." This is how the verse is currently translated. As one can see, the two meanings are very similar. (Ed.)

3 The author has inferred this entire paragraph from the usage of the letter *fā*ʾ at the beginning of verses 79:4-5. (Ed.)

4 In other words, all forces and factors at play are incomplete causes that are insufficient in effecting anything, until they are approved and supported by God's will. This is an intermediate and dualistic metaphysics. (Ed.)

toward God's command to direct the affairs of the world. Having clarified these verses, the meaning of the first two verses becomes apparent: *By those who pull out fully! who discharge gently* (79:1-2). These two verses describe the onset of the angels' dispatch and exit from the station of receiving God's command toward its execution. What is meant by "pulling out fully" [79:1] is taking the first steps with force and diligence to descend toward their goal. What is meant by their "discharge" [79:2] is to leave their position toward that goal. Similarly, their "sweeping" [79:3] means moving quickly toward it, which is followed by surpassing [others] in their mission [79:4] and directing the affairs with God's leave [79:5].

The five opening verses swear by the different stages that the angels pass through when they direct any affair of the visible world, from when they commence their descent until they complete their management of the matter. These verses describe the angelic aspect of how the world is governed, which is applicable to the occurrence of any event. Likewise, we will read below about the Lord's governance of the visible world: *Has the story…* (79:15). The angelic aspect provides a proof for resurrection and retribution, and the worldly aspect provides another proof. We shall discuss these below, by God's will.

The above is what we can say by contemplating on the theme and context of the verses. This interpretation is confirmed in some traditions, which we shall present in our examination of narrations below, if God wills.

Discussion on the Angels' Intermediation in the Direction of Affairs

According to the Qur'an, the angels are intermediaries between God and the beings, both in their origin and their return. That is, they are causal links that transcend the material causes which operate in the visible world, both before the occurrence of death—whereby one passes on to the next world—and after it. Their involvement in the affairs of the beings can be classified into three stages:

(1) They are involved in the return of the beings, which includes manifesting the symptoms of death, drawing the souls out of the bodies, interrogating the people and administering rewards or punishments in the grave, causing the death of everyone by blowing in the Trumpet, raising the dead to life by blowing in the Trumpet [a second time], gathering everyone [on the Day of Resurrection], distributing the records of deeds, setting up the

balance, reckoning the deeds, and driving the people either to paradise or hell. This aspect of their involvement is needless of any elaboration, since there are numerous verses on it. Similarly, there are countless narrations from the Prophet and the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt in this regard.

(2) They are involved on the plane of legislation (*tashrīʿ*), which includes conveying divine revelation, warding off the devils from interfering in it, supporting the messengers, assisting the believers, and purifying them through praying for their forgiveness. This aspect is also needless of elaboration.

(3) They are involved in managing the affairs of this world. We can infer this from the opening verses of this chapter, as we explained above: *By those who pull out fully! By those who discharge gently! By those who sweep swiftly! By those who hasten with haste! By those who direct the affairs* (79:1-5). This is also reflected in the verse: *Maker of the angels [His] messengers, possessing wings, two, three or four* (35:1). The unqualified expression of this verse apparently shows that the angels are created to serve as intermediaries between God and His creation, and to be dispatched to execute His command. Moreover, the ascription of wings to them reflects this aspect of their involvement. Their execution of God's command can also be inferred from these verses: *Rather they are [His] honored servants. They do not venture to speak ahead of Him, and they act by His command* (21:26-27); *They fear their Lord above them, and do what they are commanded* (16:50).

The only role and function of the angels is to intermediate between God and His creation by applying His command to His creation. Their involvement is not haphazard or coincidental. In other words, it is not the case that God would carry out a certain act by their involvement in one case, and then would conduct another similar act without their intermediation. This is because there is no change nor any violation to God's custom: *Indeed my Lord is on a straight path* (11:56); *Yet you will never find any change in Allah's way, and you will never find any revision in Allah's way* (35:43).

The intermediation of the angels is ordered in a hierarchal chain. They conduct the affairs by a superior angel commanding its subordinates. This means that the leader angel is itself an intermediary between God and its subordinate angels: God's command reaches the followers through the intermediation of the leader angel. One example of this is the Angel of Death, who orders some of his assistants and followers to seize some souls. The Qur'an narrates from some angels: *There is none among us but has a*

known station (37:164). Elsewhere it says [about Gabriel]: *one who is obeyed there, and is trustworthy* (81:21); *When fear is lifted from their hearts, they [some angels] will say, "What did your Lord say?" They [other angels] will say, "The truth"* (34:23).

The angels' role as intermediaries between God and the events means that they can be identified as causes for the occurrence of events. Nonetheless, this does not contradict identifying other causes for the events, such as the immediate material causes in the world of nature. This is because angelic causes and material causes are not horizontal causes on the same plane of existence, but there is a vertical relationship between them. In other words, the material cause is an immediate cause for the occurrence of an event, and the angel is the cause of that cause.

Similarly, there is no contradiction in ascribing the events to the angels—as intermediating causes—and ascribing them to God as the sole cause of all things, which is the monotheistic view of His Lordship. The reason, again, is that these causalities have a vertical relationship with one another, not a horizontal one. This can be compared with the material causes. The Qur'an confirms and approves of ascribing events to their natural causes, while it also ascribes them to the angels. The point here is that the link which connects an event to an angel is not something separate beside the link that connects it to its natural cause.[1]

In the case of God, no cause in the world is independent of Him so that it may operate on its own. There is no causality which cannot be traced to God and attributed to Him. The polytheists believed that God has entrusted and delegated the direction of affairs to the archangels [as independent agents]. But Qur'anic monotheism negates independence from all things in every aspect. No being in the world has any control over its own benefit, loss, death, life or resurrection [25:3].

A single event can be ascribed to a series of causes, starting from its immediate and proximate causes, up to its remote causes, and ultimately reaching the Almighty God. Although not fully accurate, we can use the

1 A vertical (*ṭūlī*) relationship can be compared to concentric circles, where a point can be inside both and rightly attributed to both of them. A horizontal (*ʿarḍī*) relationship can be compared to mutually exclusive circles, where there is no overlap between them. The natural causal link is an extension or manifestation of the angelic causal link. Thus is the case of all causation in existence: there is only a single Cause of everything in reality; all other causes are reflections and expressions of That. (Ed.)

analogy of writing to illustrate this to some extent. The writing is most immediately attributable to the pen. On a slightly higher level, it is attributable to the hand which wields the pen. And next comes the person who employs the hand and the pen to write. The real cause here is the person who is independent in their causality. Nevertheless, the act of writing can also be ascribed to the pen and the hand in a sense.

The angels are intermediaries in the direction of affairs, as we explained. This does not contradict the Qur'anic view that some or all angels are constantly engaged in worshiping, glorifying and prostrating before God: *and those who are near Him do not disdain to worship Him, nor do they become weary. They glorify [Him] night and day, and they do not flag* (21:19-20); *Indeed those who are [stationed] near your Lord do not disdain to worship Him. They glorify Him and prostrate to Him* (7:206). The reconciliation here lies in the possibility that their worship, prostration and glorification may be their very involvement in directing the affairs and obeying God's commands as intermediaries. Perhaps there is some allusion to this in the verse: *To Allah prostrates whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth, including animals and angels, and they are not arrogant* (16:49).

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يَوْمَ تَرْجُفُ الرَّاجِفَةُ ۝٦ تَتْبَعُهَا الرَّادِفَةُ ۝٧

(79:6-7) *The day when the Quaker* (al-rājifah) *quakes, and is followed by the Successor* (al-rādifah).

Here are a few suggested interpretations for the terms in these verses:

(1) *Rājifah* means "a shaking, a tremulous and booming shriek." *Rādifah* means "something that follows and comes later."

Comment: Based on these meanings, the two verses would correspond to the two blows of the Trumpet, as stated in this verse: *And the Trumpet will be blown, and whoever is in the heavens will swoon and whoever is on the earth, except whomever Allah wills. Then it will be blown a second time, behold, they will rise up, waiting* (39:68).

(2) *Rājifah* means "something that moves another thing violently." The intransitive meaning of *rajf* is "shaking violently." Its transitive meaning is "shaking something violently."

Comment: According to this meaning, *al-rājifah* would again correspond to the first blow of the Trumpet, which will shake the earth and

the mountains. Then *al-rādifah* would be the second blow, which is subsequent to the first one.

(3) What is meant by *al-rājifah* is the earth, which will quake. What is meant by *al-rādifah* is the heavens and the stars, which will be shaken, split and demolished.

Comment: The last two interpretations are not quite apparent, especially the last one.

Either way, the complement of the vow in the previous verses is an event which is not mentioned, which itself indicates the intensity and grandeur of the event. The implied meaning is: "You shall certainly be resurrected." Given this context, *The day* (79:6) identifies the time of that event. Another suggested interpretation is that *The day* (79:6) present the container for what comes next [in verse 79:8]. The meaning would be: "Hearts will be trembling on that day—the day when the Quaker quakes." This, however, is not apparent.

قُلُوبٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَاجِفَةٌ ﴿٨﴾

(79:8) *Hearts will be trembling* (wājifah, from wajīf) *on that day,*

The indefinite form of the word "hearts" (*qulūbun*) indicates diversification.[1] In this verse, *Hearts* is the subject and its predicate is: *will be trembling*. *Wajīf* is synonymous with *iḍṭirāb* (agitation, disturbance, upset). *On that day* identifies the time of *trembling*. This verse is a new and independent statement which elucidates the state of affairs *on that day*.

أَبْصَارُهَا خَاشِعَةٌ ﴿٩﴾

(79:9) *their looks humbled.*

The antecedent of the pronoun "their" is *hearts* (79:8). When psychological and cognitive qualities—such as knowledge, fear and hope—are ascribed to the heart, what is meant by the heart is the human soul, as we have explained before. That is why the verse ascribes *abṣār* (looks, visions, eyes) to the hearts. Humbleness is a trait of the hearts. It is mentioned as a quality of the eyes since the signs of the heart's humbleness appear in one's eyes more than they appear in other organs.

1 That is, the hearts will be in a variety of conditions, where *some* of them will be trembling. (Ed.)

يَقُولُونَ أَإِنَّا لَمَرْدُودُونَ فِي الْحَافِرَةِ ﴿١٠﴾

(79:10) *They say, "Will we be returned to our earlier state* (al-ḥāfirah)*?*

This verse narrates the disbelievers' claim in this world, as they considered afterlife to be an unlikely prospect. The verse implies that those whose hearts will be trembling and whose looks will be humbled on the Day of Resurrection, are the same individuals who deny the resurrection today in this world. They are those who *say, "Will we be…?" Ḥāfirah* has been defined as "the beginning and origin of something." The question in this verse is a rhetorical one, indicating unlikelihood and skepticism. The meaning is: "They say: Shall we be restored after death to our original state of life?"

Two other suggested views are:

(1) *Ḥāfirah* [a nominative substantive] means *maḥfūrah* [an accusative substantive] here, which corresponds to the grave in the ground. The meaning is: "Shall we be brought back to life from our graves after we die?"

Comment: The problem with this view should be clear.[1]

(2) The verse narrates what they will confess on the Day of Resurrection. This is what they will say after they are resurrected, and the question in the verse indicates astonishment and perplexity. When they are resurrected and witness the scene there, they will be shocked by what they will see, and will thus question if they have indeed been resurrected.

Comment: This can be a plausible meaning, but it contravenes the apparent context of the verses.[2]

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1 Apparently the problem is that the verse uses the preposition "in" (*fī*), not "from" (*min*), and it does not make sense to say, "Will we be returned *in* our graves?" However, there is a similar mismatch in the author's favored interpretation, which assumes the preposition "in" to mean "to" (*ilá*). Otherwise, it would equally not make sense to say, "Will we be returned *in* our earlier state?" Meanwhile, the first suggested view can be construed in a plausible way: "Once we are *in* our graves, shall we be returned and raised back to life?" This maintains the original meaning of the preposition *fī* in the verse. Hence, *al-ḥāfirah* can arguably be interpreted as "the grave." (Ed.)

2 The next verse clearly shows that this is what they say in this world, not on the

أَإِذَا كُنَّا عِظَامًا نَخِرَةً ﴿١١﴾

(79:11) ***What, when we are crumbled*** **(nakhirah)** ***bones?!"***

This verse reiterates the preceding rhetorical question, emphasizing the implied unlikelihood. If life after death is unlikely, then it is much more unlikely once the bones decompose and the organs disintegrate. *Nakhar* means "decay, decomposition."[1]

قَالُوا تِلْكَ إِذًا كَرَّةٌ خَاسِرَةٌ ﴿١٢﴾

(79:12) ***They said, "That, then, is a detrimental return*** **(karrah)*!"***

The demonstrative pronoun "that" refers to the idea of "return" which is implied by: *Will we be returned to our earlier state?* (79:10). *Karrah* means "return, recurrence." There are two possible interpretations for the usage of the adjective *khāsirah* (detrimental, unprofitable, losing) for *return*: (1) It is used figuratively, since the real loser is the *person* who is returned [not the return itself]. (2) *Khāsirah* means *dhāt khusrān* (characterized by loss, involving loss) [where the word *dhāt* (possessing, having) is omitted]. The meaning is: "They said, 'Such a return—that is, returning to life after death—would be a return that is covered with loss and ruin."

This statement can be construed in two ways: (1) Assuming that the previous verses—*Will we be returned…* (79:10-11)—reflect their beliefs in this world, this verse would be a pejorative statement by the disbelievers. Using a verb in the past tense—*They said*—in this verse clarifies that the present tense verb above—*They say* (79:10)—is about their current state of affairs [not what they *will* say on the Day of Resurrection]. (2) Assuming that the previous verses describe what they will say upon the resurrection, this verse would reflect their regret and disappointment [on that day].

فَإِنَّمَا هِيَ زَجْرَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ ﴿١٣﴾

(79:13) ***Yet it will be only a single shout*** **(zajrah),**

The antecedent of the pronoun "it" is *return* (79:12). Some have

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Day of Resurrection. (Ed.)

1 It is used as *nakhira yankharu nakharan*, whereby the bone is called *nākhir* or *nakhir*. (Auth.)

suggested that the antecedent is *the Successor* (79:7), which indicates the second blow of the Trumpet. *Zajr* means "driving away by a cry or a sound." This term is used for the second blow of the Trumpet in the sense that the blow will cause them to move from the state of death to the state of life; from below the earth to above it.

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فَإِذَا هُمْ بِالسَّاهِرَةِ ﴿١٤﴾

(79:14) *and behold* (fa-idhā), *they will be on the plain* (bil-sāhirah).

The word *idhā* indicates suddenness and abruptness. *Sāhirah* means "a level ground" or "a field that is not vegetated."

These two verses [79:13-14] serve as a response to audience's implied unlikelihood of the resurrection on the account of its difficulty, as reflected above: *Will we be returned…* (79:10-12). The meaning is: "It is no hard task for Us to revive them after death and bring them back, because their return—or the Successor, meaning the second blow of the Trumpet—will be a matter of a single cry. Then they will be alive on the face of the ground right away, after having been dead inside it." These two verses are thematically comparable to the verse: *The matter of the Hour is just like the twinkling of an eye, or [even] swifter* (16:77).

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هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ مُوسَىٰ ﴿١٥﴾

(79:15) *Has the story of Moses reached you?*

This verse and its following eleven verses [up to verse 79:26] present the story of Moses, when he was sent to Pharaoh, who declined his call, *So Allah seized him with the exemplary punishment of the last and the first* (79:25). The story is an admonition and warning to the polytheists. Their argument was: (1) there is no afterlife. (2) Religion does not make sense without the hereafter. (3) Thus we reject the religious call. Just as it threatens the deniers, the story also comforts the Prophet against them. This can be inferred from using the second person in the current verse: *Has the story of Moses reached you?* (79:15).

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In addition, this story proves the truth of resurrection and retribution. The horrendous destruction of Pharaoh and his hosts clearly show that Moses was truly God's messenger toward the people. His mission from God shows that God is the Lord of humankind. This refutes the view of the polytheists, holding that people are not under the lordship of God,

but they are subject to the reign of lower lords, and that God is the Lord of the lords only.

Has the story of Moses reached you? This is a persuasive question, meant to raise the interest of the audience [that is, the Prophet] to listen to the story so that it may console him. As we said above, it also warns the disbelievers since it talks about God's punishment. Hence, it leaves them with no excuse or argument [against God].

There is no problem in asking such a rhetorical question to an audience who already knows the story. This is because the purpose of the question is to turn the audience's attention to the story, without expecting an answer from them. Therefore, it is possible that this was the first Qur'anic mention of the story of Moses, as it is also possible that the story was mentioned before. In fact, there is a brief reference to the story in Sūrah al-Muzzammil [73:15-16], which was revealed before the current sūrah. There is also a more elaborate account of the story in Sūrah al-Aʿrāf and Sūrah Ṭā-Hā [7:103-171 and 20:9-97, which were also revealed prior to the current sūrah].

إِذْ نَادَاهُ رَبُّهُ بِالْوَادِ الْمُقَدَّسِ طُوًى ﴿١٦﴾

(79:16) ***When his Lord called out to him in the holy valley of Ṭuwá,***

This verse presents the time of the occurrence of *the story* (79:15). It refers to the first revelation from God to Moses, whereby he was appointed to be a divine messenger. *Ṭuwá* is the name of the holy valley [where Moses first received revelation].

اذْهَبْ إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَىٰ ﴿١٧﴾

(79:17) ***[and said,] "Go to Pharaoh, [for] indeed he has transgressed,***

This verse interprets and explains the clause, *his Lord called out to him* (79:16). Two other suggested views are:

(1) There is an omitted verb "say" in the verse. The implied meaning is: "He said, 'Go to…'"

(2) There is an omitted particle *an* (that) which indicates that the verse is interpretative of what was mentioned before. The implied meaning is: "That 'Go to…'"

Comment: The problem with both views is that there is no need for assuming an omission in the verse.

… indeed he has transgressed: This sentence is a justification for the

previous command.

فَقُلْ هَلْ لَكَ إِلَىٰ أَنْ تَزَكَّىٰ ﴿١٨﴾

(79:18) ***and say, 'Are you willing to purify yourself*** **(tazakká, from tazakkī)*****?***

The literal text of the verse is incomplete, as it says: "Do you have any to purify yourself?" The preposition "to" (*ilá*) clarifies what the omitted word is: "Do you have any *willingness* or *inclination* to purify yourself?" *Tazakkī* here means "purifying oneself" from the defilements of transgression.

وَأَهْدِيَكَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَتَخْشَىٰ ﴿١٩﴾

(79:19) ***And I will guide you to your Lord, that you may fear [Him]?'"***

The conjunction "and" connects this verse to the clause, *purify yourself* (79:18). It is said that "guiding him to his Lord" means teaching him about his Lord and leading him to know God. The result of that would be developing an awe of the divine, which would prevent one from violating and transgressing the boundaries of servitude. The Qur'an says: *Only those of Allah's servants having knowledge fear Him* (35:28).

There are two possible interpretations here: (1) *Tazakkī* (self-purification) in the last verse means cleansing oneself of transgression by means of repentance and returning to God. Then *fear* in this verse is a result of that, meaning a kind of fear which comes with *īmān* (belief, faith), and which stops one from disobedience. (2) *Tazakkī* means cleansing oneself through obedience and abstinence from sin. Then this verse—*And I will guide you to your Lord, that you may fear [Him]?*—is an interpretation of the last verse. Therefore, the conjunction "and" at the beginning of the verse would be interpretive.[1]

فَأَرَاهُ الْآيَةَ الْكُبْرَىٰ ﴿٢٠﴾

(79:20) ***Then he showed him*** **(fa-arāhu)** ***the greatest sign.***

The letter *fā'* (lit. so, then, therefore) at the beginning of the verse is

1 In the first interpretation, *tazakkī* is a cure. In the second case, it is prevention. (Ed.)

called *fāʾ al-faṣīḥah* (indicative, revelatory, clarifying), indicating an omission in the verse.[1] The implied meaning is: "So Moses went to him, called him [to his message], and then showed him…"

Based on the elaborate accounts of this story [in other Qur'anic chapters], *the greatest sign* refers to the miracle of the staff. Some have said that all miracles that were shown to Pharaoh and his elites are intended here, but that is unlikely.

فَكَذَّبَ وَعَصَىٰ ﴿٢١﴾

(79:21) *But he denied and disobeyed,*

Pharaoh rejected Moses, denied his mission, accused him of sorcery, and disobeyed his commands—or disobeyed God.

ثُمَّ أَدْبَرَ يَسْعَىٰ ﴿٢٢﴾

(79:22) *Then he turned back* (adbara, from idbār), *striving* (yasʿū, from saʿy).

Idbār means "turning away." *Saʿy* means "striving, effort." Pharaoh turned back, doing his best to oppose Moses, and striving hard to refute his message.

فَحَشَرَ فَنَادَىٰ ﴿٢٣﴾

(79:23) *Then he mustered* (fa-ḥashara, from ḥashr) *[the people], then he proclaimed:*

Ḥashr means "gathering the people by force." What is meant here is that he mustered the people from across his kingdom. This can be inferred from the use of the letter *fāʾ* (so, then, therefore) in the next part of the verse: *then he proclaimed* (fa-nādá)*: saying, "I am your highest lord!"* (79:23-24).

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1 *Fāʾ al-faṣīḥah* indicates an omission of a clause or sentence which can be inferred from the context. It often implies: "Given what was said above…" More precisely, *fāʾ al-faṣīḥah* indicates a conditional sentence, where the introductory clause (protasis) is omitted, and only the complement (apodosis) is stated. The omitted protasis can be inferred from the previous discussion, while the resulting concision enhances the eloquences of the speech. The implied meaning is: "Following the above instructions, Moses went to Pharaoh, and, among other things, he showed Pharaoh the greatest sign." (Ed.)

This shows that he claimed lordship over the entire Egypt, not only over a particular group of them.

Some have said that "mustering" in this verse refers to summoning the magicians, as per these verses: *Then Pharaoh sent heralds* (ḥāshirīn, from ḥashr) *to the cities* (26:53); *Then Pharaoh withdrew [to consult privately], summoned up* (fa-jamaʿa, from jamʿ) *his guile, and then arrived [at the scene of the contest]* (20:60). However, there is no evidence to show that *ḥashr* (mustering, summoning) in the current verse is the same as *ḥashr* and *jamʿ* (gathering) in the two quoted verses.

فَقَالَ أَنَا رَبُّكُمُ الْأَعْلَىٰ ﴿٢٤﴾

(79:24) ***saying, "I am your highest lord!"***

This verse reflects Pharaoh's claim to lordship. Its apparent meaning is that he claimed to be superior to the other lords which his idolatrous people believed in. He held himself to be above their gods.

Pharaoh was himself a polytheist who worshiped the idols. This can be inferred from a verse in the Qur'an where his elite ask him: *Will you leave Moses and his people to cause corruption in the land, and to abandon you and your gods?* (7:127). Perhaps what he meant by his superiority over the other gods was that he was the closest of them to his people—in the sense that he controlled their livelihood, maintained order among them through his rule, and preserved their glory and honor [among other nations] through his command. The other gods lacked these qualities.[1]

Some have said that he meant setting himself above the other officials and authorities in the nation. This effectively means that he claimed to be the top monarch in Egypt, saying that he wields lordship over all other rulers and agents in the land. This would make the verse comparable to what is narrated from him elsewhere: *And Pharaoh proclaimed amongst his people. He said, "O my people! Does not the kingdom of Egypt belong to me…?"* (43:51). However, there are two problems with this view: (1) It is against the apparent meaning of the verse. (2) It is against other verses, where he says to his elite: *O [members of the] elite! I do not know of any god that you may have other than me* (28:38); and says to Moses: *If you take up any god other than me, I will surely make you a prisoner!* (26:29).

1 For more on this and its rival views, see volume 16, pp. 47-50 of the English translation, under verse 7:127. (Ed.)

فَأَخَذَهُ اللَّهُ نَكَالَ الْآخِرَةِ وَالْأُولَىٰ ﴿٢٥﴾

(79:25) ***So Allah seized him with the exemplary punishment*** **(nakāl)** ***of the last and the first.***

"Seizing" is an indirect expression for punishment. *Nakāl* is a type of punishment that deters one who sees it or hears about it from qualifying for its like. God's punishment in the hereafter serves this purpose in the sense that those who hear about it should avoid sinful acts that would lead one to it. The same can be said about God's exterminating punishments in this world. The meaning is: "God seized Pharaoh—that is, He punished him—by an exemplary punishment in the hereafter and in this world." The punishment of Pharaoh in this world was for God to drown him and his hosts. His punishment of the hereafter is punishment after death. Accordingly, *the first* and *the last* mean the life of this world and the hereafter, respectively.[1]

Other suggested meanings are:

(1) *The last* refers to Pharaoh's final claim: *I am your highest lord!* (79:24), while *the first* refers to what he claimed before that: *I do not know of any god that you may have other than me* (28:38). Because of making these claims, God seized him and punished him with an exemplary punishment.

(2) *The first* means Pharaoh's initial rejection and disobedience at the outset of Moses' mission, and *the last* means the claim he made at the end of the story: *I am your highest lord!* (79:24).

(3) *The first* refers to his earlier sins, while *the last* refers to his later sins. The meaning is: "God seized him with punishment for all of his sins."

Comment: None of these three views is quite apparent.

إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَعِبْرَةً لِّمَن يَخْشَىٰ ﴿٢٦﴾

(79:26) ***There is indeed a lesson in that for one who fears*** **(yakhshá, from khashyah)*!***

The demonstrative pronoun "that" refers to the story of Moses.

1 Apparently *the last* is mentioned before *the first* because eternal punishment is more severe and significant than worldly pain. The order also maintains the rhyme of the verses. (Ed.)

Apparently the object of "fear"—which is commonly used with the word *khashyah* (fear, awe, concern)—is deliberately omitted here as no particular object is intended. The meaning is: "Indeed in this narrative—the story of Moses—is a lesson for anyone who has a sense of caution." It is part of human nature to fear punishment and misery instinctively. Thus, there is a lesson in this story for anyone whose innate human nature is intact.

Another suggested interpretation is: The object of fear is God, which is omitted. The implied meaning is: "for one who fears God." However, the first interpretation is more expressive.

أَأَنْتُمْ أَشَدُّ خَلْقًا أَمِ السَّمَاءُ ۚ بَنَاهَا ﴿٢٧﴾

(79:27) ***Are you more prodigious in creation or the sky? He built it.***

From this verse to verse 79:33, there is a message of rebuke and criticism directed at the polytheists who denied and derided the afterlife. They deemed the resurrection to be an unlikely prospect by saying: *Will we be returned to our earlier state? What, when we are crumbled bones?!* (79:10-11). These verses respond to that notion by saying that God has indeed created things that are far more substantial and sturdier than them. Therefore, He is certainly capable of recreating them in another realm.

In addition to proving the *possibility* of resurrection, the verses also prove its inevitable *occurrence*. The verses discuss God's direction of the entire universe and how humankind is a part of that. This proves God's Lordship [over all beings, including humans]. His Lordship in turn necessitates prophethood and religious obligation. That in turn requires retribution, which would occur upon the resurrection in the afterlife. That is why after these verses God concludes: *So when the Greatest Catastrophe befalls…* (79:34).

Are you more prodigious in creation or the sky…: This is a rhetorical question which implies censure. It is meant to remove their skepticism about resurrection after death.

… He built it: This is a separate sentence, which marks an elaborate description of how God created the sky. This elaboration serves to confirm that the sky is indeed *more prodigious in creation*.

رَفَعَ سَمْكَهَا فَسَوَّاهَا ﴿٢٨﴾

(79:28) ***He raised its vault*** **(samkahā),** ***and fashioned it*** **(fa-sawwāhā, from taswiyah).**

Samk means "the roof or the upper part of something." *Taswiyah* means "arranging and placing the constituents of something together in their proper place, according to a wise plan." This is what the term means in the verse: *So when I have proportioned him* (sawwaytuhu) *and breathed into him of My spirit* (15:29, 38:72).

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وَأَغْطَشَ لَيْلَهَا وَأَخْرَجَ ضُحَاهَا ﴿٢٩﴾

(79:29) ***And He darkened its night, and He brought forth its day*** **(ḍuḥāhā).**

God made the night dark, and manifested the day. The original meaning of *ḍuḥá* is "the expansion of sunlight and the extension of the day." What is meant here is the entire day in general, since it is used in contradistinction with night. Night and day are attributed to the sky since they have a heavenly cause, which is the appearance or disappearance of luminous bodies like the sun. Night and day are not only applicable to our planet earth, but also to any heavenly body that draws light from other bodies while it is dark itself.

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وَالْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ ذَٰلِكَ دَحَاهَا ﴿٣٠﴾

(79:30) ***And after that He spread*** **(daḥāhā)** ***the earth,***

God expanded and stretched the earth after the previous stages—of building the sky, raising its vault, proportioning it, darkening its night, and brightening its day. *Daḥw* has also been defined as "rolling out." Some have interpreted the verse as: "And with that He spread the earth." That is, "after" (*baʿd*) here means "with" (*maʿa*), just as in the verse: *callous and, on top of that* (baʿd dhālika), *baseborn* (68:13). We discussed the apparent Qur'anic view of the creation of the heavens and the earth in Sūrah Fuṣṣilat.[1]

أَخْرَجَ مِنْهَا مَاءَهَا وَمَرْعَاهَا ﴿٣١﴾

(79:31) ***and He brought forth from it its water and pastures*** **(marʿāhā),**

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"Bringing forth its water" refers to springs gushing forth, and rivers flowing on the earth. "Bring forth its pastures" refers to the growth of

1 See the author's exegesis of verse 41:11. (Ed.)

plants which both animals and humans feed on. While *marʿá* is often used exclusively for what animals eat, apparently what is meant here is plants and vegetables in general, including the nourishment of both animals and humans. This can be deduced from a verse below: *an enjoyment for you and your livestock* (79:33). Here are some suggested interpretations for *marʿá* (pasture):

(1) It is used synonymously with *riʿy* (plant).
(2) It is a gerund (grazing, pasturing).
(3) It is a temporal noun (grazing time).
(4) It is a locative noun (pasture, grazing place).

وَالْجِبَالَ أَرْسَاهَا ﴿٣٢﴾

(79:32) ***and He made firm the mountains,***

God established the mountains firmly on the earth to keep it from agitation, and to store water and minerals in it. This is reflected in other verses in the Qur'an.[1]

مَتَاعًا لَّكُمْ وَلِأَنْعَامِكُمْ ﴿٣٣﴾

(79:33) ***an enjoyment for you and your livestock.***

God has created and directed the above constituents of the heavens and the earth so that they may be an enjoyment for you and your livestock. He has also made your livestock subservient to you so that you may benefit from them in your life. Such beneficial creation and direction makes it incumbent on you to know your Lord, to be wary of Him, and to be grateful to Him. For the same reason, there must be a day when you will be recompensed for how you act in this regard. If you do good, then you will have a good reward; and if you do evil, then evil. Moreover, since this creation and direction is mightier than yours, you are not justified in deeming your second creation an unlikely occurrence, or difficult for God.

فَإِذَا جَاءَتِ الطَّامَّةُ الْكُبْرَىٰ ﴿٣٤﴾

(79:34) ***So when*** **(fa-idhā)** ***the Greatest Catastrophe*** **(al-ṭāmmah)** ***befalls,***

1 See verse 78:7 above. (Ed.)

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> *Ṭāmmah* means "high, dominant, overwhelming." *Aṭamm* is synonymous with *aʿlá* (higher, superior). When a bird surmounts a tree, it is said that "the bird *ṭamma* (mounted, rose, ascended)." Any overwhelming calamity that cannot be deflected is called *ṭāmmah*.

Ṭāmmah in this verse means the resurrection, in the sense that it is a calamity which surmounts and defeats every dreadful disaster. That is why it is described as *the Greatest*, and is used in an unqualified way. The letter *fāʾ* (lit. so, then, therefore) at the beginning of the verse indicates that the message of this verse—that is, the occurrence of the resurrection—is a necessary consequence of the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the order by which they are directed. We explained this [connection] above.

يَوْمَ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا سَعَىٰ ﴿٣٥﴾

(79:35) *the day when man will remember what he has striven* (saʿá, from saʿy),

This verse identifies the time when *the Greatest Catastrophe befalls* (79:34). *Saʿy* means "hard work."

وَبُرِّزَتِ الْجَحِيمُ لِمَنْ يَرَىٰ ﴿٣٦﴾

(79:36) *and hell is brought into view* (burrizat, from tabrīz) *for one who sees.*

Tabrīz means "to manifest, to expose, to show." What is meant by the clause, *one who sees* is anyone who has eyes and can see.[1] The meaning is: "Hell will be exposed to anyone who has sight. The veil will be lifted from it, so they will witness it directly." This verse is comparable to the verse: *You were certainly oblivious of this. We have removed your veil from you, and so your sight is sharp today* (50:22), although verse 50:22 has a more comprehensive meaning [than seeing hell in particular]. This verse clearly shows that hell is already created before the Day of Resurrection; what happens on that day is that it will become manifest as the veils will be removed.

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1 The object of the verb "see" is deliberately omitted. (Auth.)
In other words, the verse is not about seeing anything in particular, but it is about vision in general. (Ed.)

فَأَمَّا مَنْ طَغَىٰ ﴿٣٧﴾ وَآثَرَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا ﴿٣٨﴾ فَإِنَّ الْجَحِيمَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَىٰ ﴿٣٩﴾ وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ وَنَهَى النَّفْسَ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ ﴿٤٠﴾ فَإِنَّ الْجَنَّةَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَىٰ ﴿٤١﴾

(79:37-41) ***Then, as for him who transgressed*** **(ṭaghá, from tughyān),** ***and preferred the life of this world, his abode will indeed be hell. But as for him who feared*** **(khāfa, from khawf)** ***his Lord's station and forbade his soul from desire, his abode will indeed be paradise.***

These verses elaborately discuss how people will be classified into two categories on that day. We can infer an omitted concise statement—as a complement of the clause, *So when…* (79:34)—from this elaborate account. The implied meaning is: "*So when the Greatest Catastrophe befalls*, people will be divided into two groups. *Then, as for him who transgressed…*"

There are two triads here, where God classifies the people into the dwellers of hell, and the inhabitants of paradise. The dwellers of hell are discussed first because the verses are primarily addressed to the polytheists. Those who are doomed to hell are defined by these qualities: *him who transgressed, and preferred the life of this world* (79:37-38). This is contrasted with defining the inhabitants of paradise as follows: *him who feared his Lord's station and forbade his soul from desire* (79:40). The traits of each group are mentioned as a general standard that can be applied to assess anyone. Since the two groups are contrasted with one another in this classification, the attributes of each group are the opposite of the other group. This should clarify the two qualities mentioned for each group:

(1) The inhabitants of paradise are characterized by fearing (*khawf*) the station of their Lord. *Khawf* is the impression of someone who is weak and dominated by someone who is strong and overpowering. It involves the humility and awe of the former before the latter. It follows from this that the dwellers of hell are characterized by transgression (*tughyān*), which means violating and exceeding the limits. That is, they have no regard for the station of their Lord due to their arrogance [and pride]. They are not humble and obedient toward their Lord but transgress the limits of servitude. They follow a course other than what

He has prescribed for them, and they opt out of the eternal bliss that He has preferred for them. Instead, they follow their desires in pursuing the adornments of worldly life.

(2) An implication of their transgression is preferring the worldly life [over eternal bliss], as the verse says: *and preferred the life of this world* (79:38). This is the same as following one's ego and obeying personal desires in opposition to God. It follows that the opposite of "transgression"—which is "fearing God"—would have an equally opposite implication, which is a tendency not to incline to the worldly life, and to forbid the ego from pursuing its desires. This is the second attribute of the inhabitants of paradise in these verses, after their trait of fear: *and forbade his soul from desire* (79:40).

Verse 79:40 stipulates "forbidding" from evil and not "avoiding" evil altogether. This is in consideration of the inherent weakness of humankind, which may lead them to slip into sin—not out of arrogance and defiance. For such slips, God is expansive in forgiveness, as He says: *To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth, that He may requite those who do evil for what they have done, and reward those who do good with the best [of rewards]. Those who avoid major sins and indecencies, excepting [minor and occasional] lapses. Indeed, your Lord is expansive in [His] forgiveness* (53:31-32); *If you avoid the major sins that you are forbidden, We will absolve you of your misdeeds, and admit you to a noble abode* (4:31).

In short, we can deduce the following standards concerning the characteristics of the dwellers of hell and the inhabitants of paradise from the three verses that describe each group: The dwellers of hell are characterized by disbelief and sin, while the inhabitants of paradise are characterized by belief and *taqwá* (Godwariness, self-restraint, piety). There remain other groups in between them, such as *al-mustaḍʿafūn* (the disadvantaged, the oppressed, the abased) [4:97-99] and *others who have confessed to their sins, having mixed up righteous conduct with other that was evil* (9:102). Their case will be up to God to decide [6:159]. He may embrace them in His forgiveness through intercession or other means.

his abode will indeed be hell: The verse literally says, "Hell will be the abode (*al-maʾwá*)." This can be interpreted in two ways: (1) "Hell will be *his* abode," where the definite article *al-* has substituted the pronoun. (2) "Hell will be the abode *for him*," where the pronoun is omitted.

But as for him who feared his Lord's station* (maqām)*…: There are

three primary meanings for *maqām*:

(1) It is a locative noun (place, position, station), meaning the place where an object is located.
(2) It is a temporal noun (time of standing and rising).
(3) It is a gerund (standing).

Besides its primary meanings, sometimes a certain attribute or condition of something is treated as a "place" where it is grounded and situated. Thus that quality is called the *maqām* (position, station) of the thing. This meaning is found in a verse about testimony: *then two others shall stand up in their place* (maqāmahumā) (5:107). Similarly, God narrates Prophet Noah telling his people: *If my standing* (maqāmī) *[among you] be hard on you and [also] my reminding you of Allah's signs* (10:71). Likewise, He narrates from the angels: *There is none among us but has a known place* (maqām) (37:164).

Accordingly, since the verse [79:40] ascribes *maqām* to the Lord, it means God's quality of Lordship, which entails many noble attributes such as omniscience, omnipotence, dominion, invincibility, mercy and wrath. God has announced and outlined His *maqām* in these verses: *do not overstep the bounds therein, lest My wrath should descend on you. And he on whom My wrath descends certainly perishes. And indeed I am All-Forgiver toward him who repents, becomes faithful and acts righteously, and then follows guidance* (20:81-82); *Inform My servants that I am indeed the All-Forgiving, the Ever-Merciful, and that My punishment is the painful punishment* (15:49-50). In short, God's *maqām* (station, position)—which these servants hold in awe—is His status of Lordship, which is a source of divine mercy and forgiveness for those who believe and restrain themselves, and a source of excruciating punishment and chastisement for those who deny and disobey.[1]

Two other suggested interpretations are:

(1) The *maqām* of one's Lord means one's position of standing before Him on the Day of Resurrection, where He would ask them about their deeds.

Comment: The problem with this view should be clear.[2]

(2) The effective meaning is "one who fears His Lord," and the word

1 Verse 14:14 can also help clarify the meaning here. (Ed.)

2 The problem is that this interpretation assumes some omission in the verse without any evidence for it. (Ed.)

maqām is *zāʾidah* (extra, supplementary, semantically empty),[1] much like the word *mathwá* (place, position) in the verse: *Honor his position* (mathwāhu) (12:21).[2]

Examining Narrations

(1) Once Imam al-Jawād was inquired about the verses, *By the night when it envelops! By the day when it brightens* (92:1-2), *By the star when it sets* (53:1) and other similar vows. He said: The Almighty God is entitled to swear by anything that He has created as He wills, but His creatures may not swear by anything other than Him.[3]

(2) [Imam] ʿAlī said: *By those who pull out fully* (79:1): These are the angels which wrest the souls of the disbelievers forcibly. *By those who discharge gently* (79:2): These are the angels which draw out the souls of the disbelievers through their nails and skins until they bring them out. *By those who sweep swiftly* (79:3): These are the angels which dart with the souls of the believers between the heaven and the earth. *By those who hasten with haste* (79:4): These are the angels which surpass one another as they take the souls of the disbelievers to God. *By those who direct the affairs* (79:5): These are the angels which direct the affairs of the servants from one year to another.[4]

Author's comment: Assuming the authenticity of this narration, it should be viewed as presenting some instances and applications of the verses [not their exclusive meaning]. The idea that they "draw out the souls

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1 As some linguists have pointed out, *zāʾidah* means *zāʾidat al-maʿnī* (that which adds more meaning). In other words, it does not mean "redundant" or "excessive," but it means "emphasizing, highlighting, underscoring." It is an *ism al-fāʿil* (nominative substantive, active participial noun), not an *ism al-mafʿūl* (accusative substantive, passive participial noun). Nevertheless, it is *semantically empty* in the sense that removing it would not damage the completeness of the sentence. (Ed.)

2 Based on this interpretation, verse 12:21 is saying, "Honor him." (Ed.)

3 *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, on the authority of ʿAlī b. Mahziyār. We presented a similar hadith to this from Imam al-Bāqir at the beginning of Sūrah al-Najm [under verses 53:1-18], from *al-Kāfī*, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Muslim.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Saʿīd b. al-Manṣur and Ibn al-Mundhir.

of the disbelievers through their nails and skins" is a way of describing their severe punishment.

(3) Once Ibn al-Kawwāʾ inquired Imam ʿAlī about *By those who direct the affairs* (79:5). He explained: These are the angels which direct the remembrance (*dhikr*) of the All-Merciful[1] and His command (*amr*).[2]

(4) Concerning *The day when the Quaker quakes, and is followed by the Successor* (al-rādifah) (79:6-7) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: The earth will split under the feet of its dwellers. *Rādifah* means *ṣayḥah* (cry, shout).

(5) Concerning *"Will we be returned to our earlier state?"* (79:10) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: The people of Quraysh said, "Shall we return [to life] after death?"

(6) Concerning *"That, then, is a detrimental return!"* (79:12) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: They uttered this pejoratively.

(7) Concerning *"Will we be returned to our earlier state* (fī al-ḥāfirah)*?"* (79:10) Imam al-Bāqir said: It [*fī al-ḥāfirah*] means "for[3] a new creation."[4]

(8) Concerning *and behold, they will be on the plain* (bil-sāhirah) (79:14) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *Sāhirah* means the earth. They are initially in the graves. Then, when they hear the cry, they will come out of the graves and settle on the earth.

(9) Concerning *And for him who fears his Lord's station will be two gardens* (55:46) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: One who knows that God sees them, hears what they say, and knows any good or evil that they do, and thus refrains from evil deeds because of that—that is one *who feared his Lord's station and forbade his soul from desire*

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1 Apparently what is meant here by "remembrance" is the Qur'an. Therefore, the verse is about the angels which bring down divine revelation and execute divine decrees. Alternatively, the verse is about angels which engage in God's remembrance and the execution of His commands. (Ed.)

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

3 The preposition used in the hadith is *fī* (lit. in), which is the same as the preposition used in the verse. However, one of the usages of this preposition is "for the purpose of," as used in many verses which talk about *jihād fī Allāh*, where *fī* means "for." (Ed.)

4 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

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(79:40).[1]

Author's comment: This hadith confirms our interpretation of "fearing God's station."

(10) Imam ʿAlī said: There are but two things that I fear about you: pursuing your desires, and having prolonged hopes.[2] Pursuing one's desires impede one from the truth. And having prolonged hopes make one forget the hereafter.[3]

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Dāwūd al-Raqqī.

2 Having prolonged hopes means developing extended dreams, plans and ambitions for the future. It is taking life for granted, and being heedless of death. (Ed.)

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Yaḥyá b. ʿAqīl.

Verses 42-46

These verses narrate the audience's inquiry about the time of the resurrection, and respond by saying that no one knows about it except God. God has exclusively preserved this knowledge with Himself.

يَسْـَٔلُونَكَ عَنِ السَّاعَةِ أَيَّانَ مُرْساها ﴿٤٢﴾

(79:42) ***They ask you concerning the Hour: when will it set in* (mursāhā)*?***

Apparently, the present tense of the verb *ask* is meant to indicate their recurrent inquiry. Having heard about the resurrection, the polytheists used to refer to the Prophet repeatedly, and insist that he specifies its time. This is mentioned in several verses in the Qur'an. *Mursá* is a *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund) which means "establishment, settlement."

… when will it set in? This is an interpretation and exposition of their question. The meaning is: "These people who deny and deride the Hour inquire from you about the Hour: when will it settle? When shall it be established?" In other words: "When will the resurrection occur?"

فِيمَ أَنْتَ مِنْ ذِكْراها ﴿٤٣﴾

(79:43) ***Where* (fī-ma)** ***are you from* (min)** ***its mention* (dhikrāhā)*?***

This is a rhetorical question which implies a negation. According to al-Rāghib, *dhikrá* means "frequent mention"; it is a more expressive and accentuated form of *dhikr* (remembrance, mention). The meaning is: "Where would you be by a frequent mention of the Hour?" That is, "What can you gain about its time of occurrence *from* frequently mentioning it?" where the preposition "from" is equivalent to "by means of." In short: "You cannot learn about its time by mentioning it frequently."[1]

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1 *Fī-ma* (in what, where) is a subject, and the clause, *are you* is its predicate. The preposition *min* (from, of) signifies the origin of a movement (called *ibtidāʾ al-ghāyah*). (Auth.)
The preposition *min* (from) indicates the point from which a distance is measured. In this verse, it shows that there is a far distance between "where you

Another possible interpretation for *dhikrá* is "mindfulness about the reality of something." Then the verse is saying rhetorically: "You are in no position to know about the reality of the Hour and its properties so that you may realize its time." This meaning is more plausible than the last one.

Here are some other suggested views about the verse:

(1) The meaning is: "The mention of [the specific time of the] the Hour is not part of your mission. Rather, I have only appointed you as *a warner for those who fear it* (79:45)."[1]

(2) *Fī-ma* rejects their question. Then the next part of the verse is a new and independent sentence which justifies why their question is out of place. The meaning is: "What is the point of this question? What matters is that you are part of its remembrance." That is, "You are part of what indicates and reminds the people of the Hour because your mission is so close to it, since you are the Seal of the Prophets. This much of knowledge [about the Hour] should suffice them [to take it seriously and prepare for it]." This is based on the Prophetic hadith: "My rising and the Hour's are like these two" [pointing to his index and middle fingers]; "it [the Hour] is about to surpass me!"

(3) This verse is a continuation of the polytheists' inquiry, addressed to the Prophet. The meaning is: "What do you know about the Hour and its time?" Alternatively: "What have you gained from frequently mentioning the Hour?"

Comment: The reader would agree that the context of the verse is not quite compatible with any of these views. Besides, all or most of them are contrived.

إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ مُنْتَهَاهَا ﴿٤٤﴾

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are" and "the mention of the Hour." (Ed.)

1 This is the most apparent meaning of the verse, which is also confirmed by the context and other similar verses. In many Qur'anic verses, *dhikrá* means "reminder," which makes is synonymous with *dhikr*. In this context, it would mean notifying the audience about the time of the Hour. Therefore, the verse is saying: "Where are you from making such a notification?" In other words: "There is a wide gap between your position—as a messenger who is *only a warner* (79:45)—and informing the people about the specific time of the Hour." (Ed.)

(79:44) ***Its end traces to your Lord.***

This verse explains and justifies the last verse: *Where are you from its mention?* (79:43). The meaning is: "You do not know the time of the Hour because its end traces to your Lord. Its reality and properties—including its specific time—are only known to your Lord. Hence, the people should not ask you about its time. Nor is it within your capacity to respond to this question."

It is also possible—and God knows best—that the verse is expressing another form of justification. The occurrence of the Hour is concomitant with the annihilation of all things, and the expiration of all apparent means and causes. The Hour means the realization and manifestation of the fact that all sovereignty and kingdom belong *to Allah, the One, the All-Paramount* (40:16). This means that the Day of Resurrection can only be ascribed to God, without anything else whatsoever intermediating between Him and that day as a real causal link. This also includes time. Accordingly, it is not perceivable for that day to have a time in the real sense of it.[1]

It is for this reason that the Qur'an defines that day only by saying that it occurs upon the extinction of the realm of this world, as reflected in the verse: *And the Trumpet will be blown, and whoever is in the heavens will swoon and whoever is on the earth* (39:68). There are other similar verses which describe the destruction of the world in various expressions, such as the transformation of the earth and the heavens [14:48], the collapse of the stars [82:2], and so on. All other definitions of the Hour in the Qur'an are metaphorical and analogical, such as: *The day they see it, it shall be as if they had not stayed [in the world] except for an evening or its forenoon* (79:46); *The day when they see what they are promised, [it will be] as though they had remained only an hour of a day* (46:35); *And on the day when the Hour sets in the guilty will swear that they had remained only for an hour* (30:55). The Qur'an then states the fact of the matter: *But those who were given knowledge and faith will say, "Certainly you remained in Allah's Book until the Day of Resurrection. This is the Day of Resurrection"* (30:56). This idea is also alluded to in several other places in the Qur'an, which talk about the Hour's occurrence as being sudden and abrupt, such as: *"It is heavy in the heavens and the earth. It will not overtake you but suddenly." They ask you as if you were well-informed of it. Say, "Its knowledge is only*

1 In other words, it does not occur in time; it is not a temporal event. (Ed.)

with Allah, but most people do not know" (7:187).

This is a profound point. A full appreciation and understanding of it requires ample reflection—to remove its apparent inconsistency with some other verses about the resurrection. The reader must particularly reflect on the verse: *You were certainly oblivious of this. We have removed your veil from you, and so your sight is sharp today* (50:22) [to untie this knot and fathom this meaning]. And God is to be sought for help.

إِنَّما أَنْتَ مُنْذِرُ مَنْ يَخْشاها ﴿٤٥﴾

(79:45) ***You are only a warner for those who fear it.***

Here God is saying: "We have charged you only with the task of warning those who fear the Hour, not with the task of informing them about when it shall occur. Thus it is not up to you to answer them about its time when they ask you about it." This means that the exclusive expression of the verse [reflected by the word *innamā* (only)] is used in a relative sense: the Prophet is called "only a warner" *as a means of* negating his knowledge about the Hour and his role of determining it for the inquirers.

Given the context, what is meant by "fear" is being apprehensive of the Hour when one is reminded about it. In other words, it means having the capacity, receptivity and propensity to fear it, even though the fear is not yet actualized before warning.

كَأَنَّهُمْ يَوْمَ يَرَوْنَها لَمْ يَلْبَثُوا إِلاَّ عَشِيَّةً أَوْ ضُحاها ﴿٤٦﴾

(79:46) ***The day they see it, it shall be as if they had not stayed [in the world] except for an evening or its forenoon.***

This verse presents a simile to depict the proximity of the Hour to their life in this world. It is so near to them that when they observe it, they will feel as though the time they spent in the earth after their life was only as much as an evening or the forenoon of that evening. That is, the distance between their life and the resurrection will be like the span of one evening or one forenoon compared to one day [of their life]. Based on this meaning, their "stay" in this verse means their stay between their life and the resurrection, which would be their stay in their graves. This is because the comparison is made with reference to their entire life in this world.

Some have said that their "stay" in this verse is the time span between their inquiry about the time of the Hour and its occurrence. The problem

with this view is that they will make this statement after they are resurrected. What is applicable at that point is to compare their life in the hereafter with their previous state, which was their state of death, not their state of death *and* some part of their life which was between their inquiry and their death. Besides, this interpretation is discordant with the apparent meaning of other verses which talk about their stay before the resurrection, such as: *He will say, "How many years did you stay in the earth?"* (23:112). Another suggested interpretation is that "stay" here means their stay in this world [that is, their entire life]. However, this is a weak interpretation.

Examining Narrations

(1) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *But as for him who feared his Lord's station and forbade his soul from desire, his abode will indeed be paradise* (79:40-41): This is about a servant who comes across an act of disobedience of God that they are capable of committing, but refrains from it and prohibits themselves from it due to their fear of God and God's prohibition. Their reward will be paradise. *They ask you concerning the Hour: when will it set in* (ayyāna mursāhā)*?* (79:42): That is, [*ayyāna mursāhā* means] when will it occur? Then God replies, *Its end traces to your Lord* (7944), meaning that its knowledge rests with God [alone]. *The day they see it, it shall be as if they had not stayed [in the world] except for an evening or its forenoon* (79:46): This means part of a day.

(2) Ibn ʿAbbās said: The polytheists in Mecca asked the Prophet pejoratively, "When will the Hour occur?" Thus these verses were revealed: *They ask you concerning the Hour: when will it set in?…* (79:42-46).[1]

(3) ʿĀʾishah said: The Messenger of God constantly inquired [God or Gabriel] about the Hour until it was revealed to him: *Where are you from its mention? Its end traces to your Lord* (79:43-44). Then he no longer inquired about it.[2]

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Ibn Mardawayh, via a weak chain of narration.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Bazzār, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, al-Ḥākim (who has authenticated it) and Ibn Mardawayh. This is also narrated from ʿUrwah in the same book, on the authority of several books, via an incomplete chain of narration (*mursal*). And a similar account is narrated

Author's comment: The verse's theme and context is incongruent with it being a response to the Prophet's question.[1]

(4) ʿĀ'ishah said: When the Bedouins went to the Prophet, they would ask him about the Hour. He would point to the youngest of them and say, "If he lives a century, your [awaited] Hour will befall you."[2]

Author's comment: This would be a form of specifying its time, which the Prophet would not do by any means. It was revealed to him in many Qur'anic sūrahs, especially Meccan ones, that the knowledge of the Hour exclusively belongs to God, and no one knows it but Him. The Prophet was commanded to respond to anyone who asked him about its time by negating his knowledge of it.

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from Ṭāriq b. Shihāb in the same book, on the authority of several books.

1 The above narration can also be read in passive voice: "The Messenger of God *was* constantly inquired about… Then he *was* no longer inquired about it." This would be congruent with the verse. The author's comment is applicable to the version narrated from Ṭāriq b. Shihāb. (Ed.)

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh.

Chapter 80

ʿ*Abasa* (He Frowned)

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Verses 1-16

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful.

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 42 verses. Traditions from Sunni sources state that the opening verses of this chapter were revealed about a blind man called Ibn Umm Maktūm, who came in the presence of the Prophet while the Prophet was having a private conversation about Islam with some leaders of the Quraysh tribe. The Prophet frowned because of his intrusion. As a result, God reproached him with these verses. There are also some Shia narrations which make reference to this narrative.

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According to other Shia accounts, it was a man from the Umayyads who frowned and turned away when he was approached by Ibn Umm Maktūm while he was in the company of the Prophet. Subsequently these verses were revealed. We will present a comprehensive analysis of these accounts under our examination of narrations, by God's will.

In any case, the aim of this chapter is to reprimand those who prefer the affluent and wealthy over the weak and humble believers; those who elevates the people of this world and degrades the people of the hereafter. The chapter then talks about the frailty of human creation, and their utmost dependence in the management of their affairs. Despite all this, they are ungrateful to their Lord's blessings and His magnificent direction of their affairs. The sūrah sums up by discussing the resurrection and retribution as a word of admonition. This chapter is Meccan beyond any doubt.

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عَبَسَ وَ تَوَلّٰى ﴿١﴾

(80:1) ***He frowned and turned away***

That is, he scowled, contracted his face, and turned his back.

أَنْ جاءَهُ الْأَعْمى ﴿٢﴾

(80:2) ***because* (an)** ***the blind man approached him.***

This verse explains the cause of the above frowning.[1]

وَ ما يُدْرِيكَ لَعَلَّهُ يَزَّكَّى ﴿٣﴾ أَوْ يَذَّكَّرُ فَتَنْفَعَهُ الذِّكْرى ﴿٤﴾

(80:3-4) ***And how do you know, maybe he would purify himself* (yazzakká, from tazakkī)*, or take admonition, and the admonition would benefit him!***

Tazakkī here means self-purification through good deeds. This would be subsequent to "taking admonition," which means heeding and paying attention to true beliefs. An admonition is "beneficial" if it leads the person to self-purification through belief and good deeds.[2]

The effective meaning is: "He frowned and turned away from the blind who came near him, while he did not know that the blind man may purify himself by good action. His purification and good deeds would be subsequent to his belief, which itself would be a result of his coming and seeking knowledge. Perhaps he has already taken admonition, or will take admonition due to coming and learning. Thus the admonition will benefit him, and he will purify himself."

The first four verses in this chapter bear a severe tone of reproval, which is highlighted by a shift in the person. The first two verses [80:1-2] are in the third person since they are about the person turning away. They reprimand the person by not talking to him directly. The next two verses [80:3-4], which convey a message of blame, are in the second person in order to confront and rebuke the person directly. This shift of address shows the intensity of the Speaker's dissatisfaction, and consolidate His binding argument against the subject.

The descriptions given for the person who came in also underline the verses' reproof. That is because:

(1) The person who came in with a need was a *blind man* (80:2) who lacked eyesight.

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1 There is an implied letter *lām* (because) before the particle *an* (lit. that). (Auth.)

2 These two verses serve as a *ḥāl* (circumstantial qualifier, participial phrase), describing the condition of "he" in *He frowned* (80:1). (Auth.)

(2) His need was religious.
(3) He came for help *striving* (80:8).
(4) He came in *while he fears [Allah]* (80:9).

In such circumstances, there is no excuse for resenting the person's arrival, frowning, and turning away. Rather, there is every reason to welcome him with special care, attention and kindness.

Assuming that the verses are about the Prophet, some have said that he is initially mentioned in the third person to venerate him, because the expression suggests that the one who frowned and turned away cannot be the Prophet. That is, such an act can never issue from the like of his personality. Then the verses shift to the second person, again for veneration, since they show kindness and proximity after the initial inattention and distance.

However, this view is not compatible with the next verses: *But for the one who is self-sufficient, you attend him* (80:5-6), because the reproval there is more severe than in the verse: *He frowned and turned away* (80:1). Moreover, there is certainly no sense of kindness or proximity in verses 80:5-6 [despite being in the second person].

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أَمَّا مَنِ اسْتَغْنَىٰ ۝٥

(80:5) *But as for someone who is self-sufficient* (istaghná, from istighnā[ʾ]),

Someone who is self-sufficient means one who is given to affluence and has donned wealth as a garment.[1] An implication of this quality is enjoying priority, superiority and prominence in the eyes of the people. This naturally makes one feel too proud to submit to the truth. The Qur'an says: *Indeed man becomes rebellious, when he considers himself without need* (96:6-7).

This verse and the next five [up to verse 80:10] present a detailed account explaining why the person frowned and turned away, and why that is blameworthy. In short, the verses are saying: "You show concern and attend to those who are too affluent and arrogant to accept the truth, while you are not responsible if they do not purify themselves. At the same time, you disregard and turn away from those who strive to purify

1 According to al-Rāghib, the words *ghiná*, *istighnā*ʾ, *taghannī* and *taghānī* are synonymous (independence, opulence). (Auth.)

themselves while they are fearful [of their Lord]."

فَأَنْتَ لَهُ تَصَدَّى ﴿٦﴾

(80:6) ***you attend*** **(taṣaddá, from taṣaddī)** ***to him,***

Taṣaddī means "taking up something by turning to it with attention and care."

وَ ما عَلَيْكَ أَلاَّ يَزَّكَّى ﴿٧﴾

(80:7) ***though you are not*** **(mā)** ***liable if he does not purify himself.***

Here are some suggested interpretations for the verse:

(1) The word *mā* is a negative particle (not). The meaning is: "There is no harm on you if he does not purify himself. Therefore, there is no reason why you should strive so hard to attract him to Islam—to the point that you turn away from a Muslim, leave him on his own, and not welcome him."

(2) The word *mā* is inquisitive (what), introducing a rhetorical question which implies a negation. The meaning is: "What will happen to you if he does not purify himself from disbelief and sin?! For verily you are only a messenger whose only obligation is to convey the message."

(3) The meaning is: "You do not care that he has not purified himself from the taints of disbelief and sin."[1]

Comment: The last interpretation is more compatible with the previous and subsequent tone of reproval.

وَ أَمَّا مَنْ جاءَكَ يَسْعى ﴿٨﴾

(80:8) ***But he who comes to you striving*** **(yasʿá, from saʿy),**

Saʿy means "walking quickly." Given the context, the meaning is: "As for the one who hastens to take admonition and purify himself through what he learns of religious teachings…"

وَ هُوَ يَخْشى ﴿٩﴾

(80:9) ***while he fears*** **(yakhshá, from khashyah)** ***[Allah],***

1 Here again the word *mā* is a negative particle. (Ed.)

What is meant here is fearing God. *Khashyah* (fear, awe, concern) is a sign and result of taking admonition from the Qur'an. God says: *We did not send down to you the Qur'an that you should be miserable, but only as an admonition to him who fears [his Lord]* (20:2-3); *he who fears [God] will take admonition* (87:10).

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فَأَنْتَ عَنْهُ تَلَهَّى ﴿١٠﴾

(80:10) ***you are neglectful*** **(talahhá)** ***of him.***

Talahhá is an elided form of *tatalahhá*, which means "you engage yourself with someone or something else." The second and third person pronouns in this verse and verse 80:6—*you attend to him*—are mentioned *before* the verb [in the original Arabic]. This shift of order reinforces and confirms the sense of rebuke in the verses.

كَلَّآ إِنَّها تَذْكِرَةٌ ﴿١١﴾

(80:11) ***Nay*** **(kallā)*****! These are indeed*** **(innahā)** ***a reminder***

The exclamation *kallā* (nay, never, no way) serves to reject the reprimanded acts of frowning, turning away, paying attention to the affluent, and disregarding the one who fears God. The pronoun "these" (the ending *hā* in *innahā*) is feminine. There are two possible explanations for its usage here: (1) It refers to the verses (*āyāt*) of the Qur'an. (2) It refers to the Qur'an, but it is feminine in accordance to the predicate of the sentence.[1]

The meaning is: "Indeed the verses of Qur'an—or the Qur'an—are a reminder. That is, they are an admonition for whoever would take heed. They are a remembrance which reminds one about true belief and righteous action."

فَمَنْ شاءَ ذَكَرَهُ ﴿١٢﴾

(80:12)***—so let anyone who wills remember it—***

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This verse is a parenthetical remark. The pronoun "it" refers either to the Qur'an, or that which the Qur'an reminds, meaning its divine teachings.

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1 *Āyāt* is the plural of *āyah*, which is feminine. The Qur'an is masculine. The sentence's predicate is *tadhkirah*, which is feminine. The feminine pronoun *hā* is used both for the singular and the plural. (Ed.)

The meaning is: "Whosoever wishes would remember the Qur'an—or that which the Qur'an reminds." What is meant by "remembrance" here is taking recourse to the directions of one's *fiṭrah* (primordial nature, innate disposition, pristine conscience), which is a tablet inscribed with true beliefs and righteous deeds.

The expression in this verse—*so let anyone who wills remember it*—alludes to the fact that there is no compulsion in the religious call to take admonition. There is no benefit for the caller in this, but all the benefit accrues to the one who takes admonition. Hence, let the person choose as they wish.

فِي صُحُفٍ مُكَرَّمَةٍ ﴿١٣﴾

(80:13) ***in honored*** **(mukarramah)** ***scriptures*** **(ṣuḥuf),**

Mukarramah is synonymous with *muʿaẓẓamah* (ennobled, glorified, magnificent). *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says:

> *Ṣuḥuf* is the plural of *ṣaḥīfah*, which is used for anything with a writing on it, whether it is of paper or something else. It is synonymous with *kitāb* (book, letter, epistle).

This verse is a second predicate for: *These are indeed* (80:11). Apparently what is meant is that the Qur'an is written in a number of scriptures in the hands of the angels of revelation. Here are two other suggested interpretations for *ṣuḥuf* (writings, records, sheets):

(1) It means the Guarded Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*).

Comment: The Qur'an has never referred to the Guarded Tablet with a plural noun, such as *ṣuḥuf* (scriptures, sheets), *kutub* (books, letters) or *alwāḥ* (tablets).

(2) It means the scriptures of the previous prophets.

Comment: This is discordant with the verse, *in the hands of envoys* (80:15), which apparently is an attribute of the *scriptures*.

مَرْفُوعَةٍ مُطَهَّرَةٍ ﴿١٤﴾

(80:14) ***exalted and purified,***

It is exalted and elevated in terms of its rank in the sight of God. It is purified from the defilements of falsehood, vain talk, uncertainty and contradictory speech. God says: *falsehood has no access to it from before it, nor from behind it* (41:42); *it is indeed a decisive word, and it is not a jest*

(86:13-14); *This is the Book, there is no doubt in it* (2:2); *Had it been from [someone] other than Allah, they would have surely found much discrepancy in it* (4:82).

بِأَيْدِى سَفَرَةٍ ﴿١٥﴾ كِرامٍ بَرَرَةٍ ﴿١٦﴾

(80:15-16) ***in the hands of envoys*** **(safarah)**, ***noble and pious.***

These verses continue counting the qualities of *scriptures* (80:13). *Safarah* is synonymous with *sufarā*ʾ, which is the plural of *safīr*, meaning "messenger, emissary, envoy." They are described as *noble* in terms of their inherent worth, and as *pious* in terms of their virtuous acts.

The meaning of the above verses [80:11-16] is: "The Qur'an is a reminder that is written in a number of scriptures which are grand and elevated in status, and pure from every taint and defilement. These scriptures are carried by the hands of angels who are noble before their Lord due to the purity of their essence, and are virtuous to Him due to their excellent deeds."

These verses show that there are several angels of revelation whose job is to carry the scriptures and convey the message of the Qur'an. Therefore, they are the Gabriel's assistants, and operate under his command. There is no inconsistency in ascribing the process of revelation both to them and to Gabriel, as the Qur'an says: *brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit upon your heart* (26:193-194). God says about Gabriel: *it is indeed the speech of a noble messenger, powerful and eminent with the Lord of the Throne, one who is obeyed and is trustworthy as well* (81:19-21). Gabriel is *obeyed* by other angels who follow his directive and execute what he commands. The act of revelation by his assistants is also Gabriel's act, just as the act of all of them is God's act. This can be compared to the seizing of the souls, which is done by angels operating under the Angel of Death. Their act is attributable to the Angel of Death, and at the same time it is an act of God. We have discussed this in several places.[1]

Here are two other suggested interpretations of *safarah*:

(1) It means the scribes among the angels.

Comment: Our interpretation above is more apparent.

(2) It means the reciters of Qur'an, who would write down and read

1 See the author's exegesis of verse 72:27, and the section titled "Discussion on the Angels' Intermediation in the Direction of Affairs," after verse 79:5. (Ed.)

the verses.

Comment: The problem with this view should be clear.[1]

Examining Narrations

(1) These verses were revealed about ʿAbd-Allāh b. Umm Maktūm, whose full name was ʿAbd-Allāh b. Shurayḥ b. Mālik b. Rabīʿah al-Fihrī, from the tribe Banū ʿĀmir b. Luʾayy.

The story is that once the Messenger of God was having a private conversation with ʿUtbat b. Rabīʿah, Abū Jahl b. Hishām, ʿAbbās b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, and the two sons of Khalaf: Ubayyah and Umayyah. He was calling them to God, and was hoping that they would embrace Islam. That is when Ibn Umm Maktūm came in and called out, "O Messenger of God! Recite for me, and teach me what God has taught you." He continued calling and repeating his demand, oblivious of the fact that the Prophet was busy and engaged with others.

Finally, an expression of displeasure appeared on the face of God's Messenger due to the interruption of his conversation. "These chiefs [of Quraysh]," the Prophet said to himself, "will now say that 'his followers are only the blind and the slaves.'" So he turned away from Ibn Umm Maktūm, toward the people whom he was speaking to. That is when these verses were revealed.

After that incident, the Messenger of God would always honor Ibn Umm Maktūm. Whenever he saw him, he would say, "Welcome to one for whom my Lord reprimanded me!" And he would inquire, "Do you need anything?" The Prophet also left Ibn Umm Maktūm as his successor in Medina on two occasions that he left for battle.[2]

Author's comment: There is no apparent indication in the verses that they were revealed about the Prophet. They only present a narrative, without identifying the person involved. On the contrary, there are indications in the verses that they are about someone else. It was not one of the traits of the Prophet to frown at his archenemies, let alone at believers who

1 The problem is that the adjectives mentioned in the verses are apparently for the angels. (Ed.)

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*. This is the gist of several accounts. Al-Suyūṭī has reported this story with slight variations in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿĀʾishah, Anas and Ibn ʿAbbās.

would come in seeking guidance. Furthermore catering for the affluent and neglecting the poor does not resemble his noble manners in any manner, as pointed out by al-Sayyid al-Murtaḍá (may God's mercy be upon him).

Elsewhere in the Qur'an, God glorifies the Prophet's character by saying: *and indeed you possess a great character* (68:4). This verse was revealed before the current chapter of discussion. The verse is in Sūrah Nūn, which was the second chapter of the Qur'an to be revealed, after Chapter 96 (*iqraʾ bism rabbika*), as all narrations on the chronological order of the sūrahs agree. How is it conceivable that God would venerates the Prophet's morality in such an unqualified way at the outset of his mission, but would later reteat and reprimand him for immoral behavior such as attending to the affluent despite their disbelief, and disregarding the poor despite their belief and quest for guidance?

Another Qur'anic evidence is: *Warn the nearest of your kinsfolk, and lower your wing to the believers who follow you* (26:214-215). The second verse orders the Prophet to humble himself before the believers. This verse is in a Meccan chapter, and it was one of the earliest verses to be revealed to the Prophet at the outset of his mission. We can deduce this from the verse before it: *Warn the nearest of your kinsfolk* (26:214).

A further Qur'anic evidence is the verse: *Do not extend your glance toward what We have provided to certain groups of them, and do not grieve for them, and lower your wing to the believers* (15:88). This verse was also revealed early on, when the Prophet made his mission public, because it is in the same context as the verse, *So proclaim what you have been commanded, and turn away from the polytheists* (15:94). How would it make sense that the Prophet would possibly frown at a believer and turn away from him when he was ordered to honor them for their faith, be gentle to them, and not extend his glance toward the material riches of the owners of this world?

Besides, there is no need of verbal or legislative prohibition against such behavior. It is a basic of human decency that one should not prefer an affluence person because of their opulence over a poor person despite their merit and righteousness. It is rather common sense that frowning and turning away from the poor and attending to the rich is inhumane. It is self-evident that wealth is no criterion for merit.

Some have said: This was not a sin by the Prophet because God had not yet prohibited him from this act. It would only be a sin if he did it *after* the revelation of the verses.

Our discussion above should clarify why this view is unacceptable. There are several problems with it: (1) It is not true that God had not prohibited the Prophet from such an act prior to the event [given the verses quoted above]. (2) Regardless of that, such an act is against the rule of reason. (3) Irrespective of that, such an act is incompatible with the noble character of the Prophet, which God glorified before the incident through an unconditional statement: *and indeed you possess a great character* (khuluq) (68:4). It should be noted that *khuluq* (character, manners, disposition) is "a second nature that is firmly established in someone," such that one's behavior would not contravene that quality.

(2) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: These verses were revealed about a man from the Umayyads. He was with the Prophet when Ibn Umm Maktūm came in. Seeing the appearance of Ibn Umm Maktūm, the man was disgusted, gathered himself, frowned and turned his face away from him. God narrated this and rebuked the man for his behavior.[1]

(3) Whenever the Messenger of God saw Abd-Allāh b. Umm Maktūm, he would say: "Welcome, welcome! By God, may God never reprimand me regarding you." The Prophet would show him so much kindness that he would avoid meeting the Prophet because of that.[2]

Author's comment: The problem with this account is the same as what we said under the first narration. The last part of the account means that Ibn Umm Maktūm would refrain from coming into the presence of the Prophet since he felt embarrassed and ashamed due to the Prophet's abundant compassion.

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, from Imam al-Ṣādiq.

Verses 17-42

These verses curse the human being and express wonder at their extreme ungratefulness toward the Lordship of their Lord. They talk about the beginning and continuation of humankind's creation, showing that they are not in charge of any aspect of themselves: neither their creation to begin with, nor the direction of their affairs subsequent to that. Rather, it is God Who has created them from a degenerate drop of sperm, Who has apportioned them, Who has facilitated their way, Who will then make them die and bury them, and Who will resurrect them whenever He wills. Hence, God is their absolute Lord Who has created them and directs their affairs. Despite this, humankind fails to fulfill the commands of their Lord and follow His guidance.

If they only look at their food—which is but a single manifestation of God's management of their affairs, and a handful from the oceans of His Mercy—they would realize how comprehensive is His direction of affairs, and how gracious is the way He deals with His servants. That is sufficient to render the intellect bewildered and the mind astonished. And beyond that are blessings that cannot be enumerated: *If you enumerate Allah's blessings, you will not be able to count them* (14:34, 16:18).

Concealing God's direction of affairs as their Lord, and failing to thank Him for His blessings, are indeed strange. *Indeed man is most unfair and ungrateful* (14:34). Soon they will see the result of their gratefulness or ungratefulness in the form of joy and radiance, or misery and darkness.

As one can see, these verses can be viewed as a continuation of the previous set of verses, following the same theme and context. Some exegetes opine that these verses were revealed on another occasion, which we will discuss below.

قُتِلَ الْإِنْسانُ ما أَكْفَرَهُ ﴿١٧﴾

(80:17) ***Perish man! How ungrateful is he!***

This is a curse on the human being due to their disposition to plunge in a pursuit of their desires, forget the Lordship of their Lord, and refuse to follow His commands.

… *How* (mā) *ungrateful is he* (akfarahu, from kufr)*:* This is an expression of astonishment at the utmost degree of *kufr* in humankind, which means "concealing the clear truth." They clearly see and realize that they are subject to God's governance, and that no one else manages their affairs whatsoever. What is meant by *kufr* (ungratefulness, disbelief) is any concealment of the truth in its general sense. That would include rejecting God's Lordship, and refraining from His worship. This is confirmed by the verses below, which talk about the different aspects of God's direction of human life as their Lord. These aspects are most congruent with interpreting *kufr* as "concealing the truth and refusing to worship." Some exegetes have interpreted *kufr* as "being ungrateful and not giving thanks." This meaning is true in its right, but our interpretation is more pertinent given the context.

Al-Kashshāf says:

> The phrase, *Perish man!* is a curse on the human being. It is the worst of its kind among the Arabs, because *being killed* is at the peak of the pains and evils of this world. The phrase *How ungrateful is he!* is an expression of astonishment at the human being's utter ingratitude with respect to God's blessings. Despite their brevity, these two phrases put together compose an expression that is most vehement, forceful, indicative of wrath, emphatic in censure, and comprehensive in rebuke.

Some have said that the particle *mā* is inquisitive (what), where the meaning is: "What is it that has made man ungrateful?" However the first interpretation is more expressive.[1]

مِنْ أَيِّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ ﴿١٨﴾

(80:18) *From what has He created him?*

Given the context, the meaning is: "From what did God create the human being so that they may rightfully refrain from belief and disobedience, and defiantly rebel?" The verse does not name the Creator, just as the subsequent verses do not name the subject. This omission indicates that the subject is more than evident. It is intuitively known to everyone that they have no creator but God, as it was also admitted by the polytheists.

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1 In the first interpretation, the particle *mā* is not inquisitive (what), but it is exclamatory (how much, so much). (Ed.)

The question in this verse emphasizes the astonishment conveyed by the last verse: *How ungrateful is he* (80:17). One shows surprise when they encounter an unexpected event with an unknown cause. Accordingly, the last verse implies that humankind's extreme ungratefulness is indeed astonishing. Then this verse asks: "Well, is there anything in their creation—as they were created by God—which may cause them to be so ungrateful?" The answer is negative [as reflected in the next verse]. This means that the human being has no justification or excuse for their concealment of the truth. It is more than evident that they are created from an insignificant drop of sperm which does not control anything of its initial creation, nor its subsequent direction of affairs throughout its life, death and resurrection. In short, the question in this verse is a prelude to the answer in the next verse: *He has created him from a drop of [seminal] fluid…* (80:19).

مِنْ نُّطْفَةٍ خَلَقَهُ فَقَدَّرَهُ ﴿١٩﴾

(80:19) ***He has created him from a drop of [seminal] fluid* (nuṭfatin)*, and then proportioned him.***

The indefinite form of the word *nuṭfatin* shows insignificance and abasement. That is: "God created humankind from a degenerate drop of seminal fluid. Given such an origin, they have no right to rebel against the commands of their Lord in arrogance."

… and then proportioned him* (fa-qaddarahu, from qadr)*: God subjected the essence, attributes and actions of humankind to *qadr* (measure, limit). Thus they cannot transgress the limits and boundaries that have been set and determined for him. God's management has completely enveloped them from every side, so they cannot autonomously venture to acquire something that has not been proportioned for them.

ثُمَّ السَّبِيلَ يَسَّرَهُ ﴿٢٠﴾

(80:20) ***Then He made the way easy for him;***

Given the context, this verse apparently negates any excuse that humans may have for their ungratefulness and arrogance. *The way* is mentioned in an unqualified form, which means the way of obeying God and following His commands. Alternatively, it means the path toward good and happiness.

This means that the verse responds to an implied question (called a

prolepsis). When it is said, *He has created him from a drop of [seminal] fluid, and then proportioned him.* (80:19), one may imagine that since they are encompassed from every side with respect to their creation and proportion, then whatever they do is a necessary consequence of their determined essence and attributes. Their actions cannot be contravened since they are compelled to perform them, since they are devoid of free will. Therefore, one has no choice regarding their *kufr* (ungratefulness, disbelief), their sinfulness, and their failure to fulfill what God has commanded them [80:23]. That is because all these ensue from the person according to God's predestination and decree. As a result, one cannot be held accountable or blamed for anything. Likewise, one would not be subject to any religious obligation, because all religious obligations hinge on free will, while the human being has no free will.

This verse answers that by saying: *Then He made the way easy for him*. The verse's point is that God's creation and proportioning of the human being do not contradict their volition. They still maintain the choice to follow the path of faith and obedience, toward the happiness for which they are created. "Everyone is facilitated toward that for which they have been created."[1] God's *taqdīr* (measurement, ordainment, allotment) applies to human acts *through* their volition. His will has decreed and determined that each person would act in a certain way *through* their free will. Therefore, the action originates from the free choice of the human being, while it is also proportioned and determined by God. This means that the human being is free in their acts, and thus responsible for them, although they are also subject to God's *qadar* (measurement, ordainment, predestination). We have discussed this repeatedly under relevant verses.[2]

Here are two other suggested interpretations for *Then He made the way easy for him*:

(1) It refers to the baby's easy passage out of the mother's womb. The meaning is: "Then God made the human's exit easy, when they

1 This is a famous Prophetic narration. (Ed.)

2 See verses 81:29 and 111:5, and number 3 under Chapter 91's examination of narrations, below. Also see volume 1, pp. 143 and 162ff of the English translation, under verses 2:21-25 and 2:26-27; volume 2, pp. 209ff and 271-272, under verses 2:153-157 and 2:164; volume 13, pp. 25ff and 81ff, under verses 6:9 and 6:35; volume 15, p. 65, under verses 7:10-25; volume 39, p. 160, under verse 74:56; p. 200, under verse 76:3; pp. 233-234 under verse 76:30. (Ed.)

were a fetus that was created from a sperm."

(2) It means guiding humankind to religion and clarifying the paths of virtue and vice to them, as the Qur'an says: *and We have shown him the two paths [of good and evil]* (90:10).

Comment: Our interpretation above is more plausible.

ثُمَّ أَماتَهُ فَأَقْبَرَهُ ﴿٢١﴾

(80:21) *then He made him die* (amātahu, from imātah) *and buried him* (fa-aqbarahu, from iqbār);

Imātah means "applying and striking death to someone." *Iqbār* means "burying someone in the grave, hiding one's body inside the earth." This is based on the common practice of people. God has ascribed the act to Himself since He is the One Who has guided them to it, and has inspired them the idea. Therefore, the act is attributable to Him, as it is also attributable to people.

Another suggested interpretation for *iqbār* is "making someone *dhū qabr* (possessor of a grave)." The meaning would be: "God has made the human being have a grave by commanding others to bury the dead. Thus He has honored them because their corpse will by buried before others are disturbed and repelled by it."

However, the first interpretation is more congruent with the context of the verses, which is how God directs the affairs of humankdind through His creation (*takwīn*). The second view, on the other hand, is based on how He directs their affairs through His legislation (*tashrīʿ*).

ثُمَّ إِذا شاءَ أَنْشَرَهُ ﴿٢٢﴾

(80:22) *and then, when He wills, He resurrects him* (ansharahu, from inshār).

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> *Inshār* means "resurrecting someone after death in order to operate," just as a folded garment is unfolded [to be used].

What is meant here is that they will be resurrected whenever God wills. This expression confirms the idea that the resurrection will be sudden; no one knows it but God.

كَلاَّ لَمَّا يَقْضِ ما أَمَرَهُ ﴿٢٣﴾

(80:23) *Nay* (kallā)*! He has not yet carried out what He had commanded him.*

Based on the context, the exclamation *kallā* (nay, never, no way) answers an implied question in the negative. The question can be deduced from the context of the verses, and more explicitly from the expression: *He has not yet carried out what He had commanded him*. The previous verses discussed how the human being is created and directed by God since the very beginning of their existence until the very end, including their creation, their proportioning, the facilitation of their way, their death, their burial, and their resurrection. Given these stages—which are all divine blessings—one would naturally ask: "So what has the human being done in return? Have they submitted to God's Lordship? Have they been grateful for His blessings?" Thus the verse replies: *Nay!* And then it elaborates: *He has not yet carried out what He had commanded him*. Instead, they have disbelieved and disobeyed what God has commanded them.

Based on the above interpretation, the pronoun "he"—in *He has not*—refers to the human being, and what is meant by "carrying out" is fulfilling what God has commanded them to perform. Some have said that the antecedent of the pronoun "he"—in *He has not*—is God, and the meaning is: "God has not ordained for this disbeliever to carry out what He has commanded them, such as belief and obedience. He has issued these orders only to complete His argument against them." However, this is far from the apparent meaning of the verse.

It should now be clear that the rebuke and censure in the above verses are directed at humankind *in general*, based on their natural inclination toward excessive *kufr* (ungratefulness, disbelief), as mentioned in the verse: *Indeed man is most unfair and ungrateful* (14:34). Then the external applications and instances of the verses would *specifically* be those who have voluntarily donned the garment of *kufr*, and have exceeded the limits [of servitude] with hostility. This refutes the view of some exegetes that the verses pertain to everyone, both believers and non-believers, because no one can worship God as He deserves. The problem with this view is that the pronouns in these verses refer to the human being which is mentioned at the beginning [80:17]. That includes all humans in the sense that they have a natural proclivity toward *kufr*. Then, the application of the verses

would be those who have *actualized* this innate propensity.[1]

فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسانُ إِلى طَعامِهِ ﴿٢٤﴾

(80:24) ***So let man observe*** **(fal-yanẓur)** ***his food:***

This verse draws the attention of humans toward their food, on which they survive and sustain their lives. This is but one among the countless blessings provided through their Lord's management, to satisfy the needs of humankind in their lives. It is meant for the people to reflect over this bounty, and thereby realize their Lord's all-encompassing direction of their affairs, which is conducted in a way that baffles the mind and stuns the intellect. They would thus observe God's extensive and delicate care for their welfare and growth.

The *man* mentioned in this verse is not the same as the *man* in the verse, *Perish man! How ungrateful is he!* (80:17). That verse was about a person who exceeds in *kufr* (ungratefulness, disbelief). This verse, however, is about someone who is ordered to reflect and observe, which includes all humans. That is why the verse has repeated the word *man* instead of using a pronoun. From this verse [up to verse 80:32] we see an elaboration of what was mentioned concisely in the previous verses. This connection is marked by the letter *fā*ʾ (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of the verse, which indicates consequence.

أَنَّا صَبَبْنَا الْماءَ صَبًّا ﴿٢٥﴾

(80:25) ***Indeed*** **(annā)** ***We poured down water plenteously*** **(ṣabban),**

Ṣabb means "pouring water from above." What is meant here is sending down rain on the earth for the growth of plants. It could also include the flow of springs and streams, since the water reservoirs inside the earth are also formed by rainwater.

The first word in the verse is commonly read as *annā* [not *innā*], which means that the verse is a continuation of the last verse. From this verse up to verse 80:32 is a detailed exposition of how God manages the food of humankind. Needless to say, this itself is a preliminary stage of elaboration;

1 In other words, the rebuke is *potentially* applicable to all humans since we all carry the gene of *kufr*. But the rebuke is *actually* applicable only to those who activate the gene and live up to its demands. (Ed.)

otherwise, a full account of the system at work—including all the features, properties, factors and causal links which govern every element of the divine plan down to the human end users—would be practically impossible to express.

ثُمَّ شَقَقْنَا الْأَرْضَ شَقًّا ﴿٢٦﴾

(80:26) ***then*** **(thumma)** ***We split the earth into fissures***

Apparently what is meant here is splitting the earth through the growth of plants. That is why this verse is added to the previous one with the conjunction *thumma* (then), while the next verse is connected to this one with the conjunction letter *fāʾ* (then).[1]

فَأَنْبَتْنا فِيها حَبًّا ﴿٢٧﴾

(80:27) ***and made the grain grow*** **(fa-anbatnā)** ***in it,***

The antecedent of the pronoun "it" is *the earth* (80:26). What is meant by *grain* in this verse is the genus of all grains that humans consume, such as barley and wheat. The same applies to *vines*, *vegetables* and the other terms.[2]

وَ عِنَباً وَ قَضْباً ﴿٢٨﴾

(80:28) ***and vines*** **(ʿinaban)** ***and vegetables*** **(ghaḍban),**

The meaning of ʿinab is well-known (grape). It is also used for the vine tree, which is perhaps what is meant in this verse. The same applies to *olives* (80:29). *Qaḍb* means "fresh vegetables and herbs" that humans consume. They are called *ghaḍb* because their plants are cut off (*yughḍabu*) repeatedly [over time]. It has also been interpreted as "plants that are harvested for the feed of animals."

وَ زَيْتُوناً وَ نَخْلاً ﴿٢٩﴾

(80:29) ***olives and date palms,***

1 *Thumma* indicates delayed sequence, while the letter *fāʾ* indicates immediate sequence. (Ed.)

2 In other words, what is named in verses 80:27-29 is human food, not animal feed. (Ed.)

These are well-known plants.

وَ حَدائِقَ غُلْباً ﴿٣٠﴾

(80:30) ***and densely-planted*** **(ghulban)** ***gardens*** **(ḥadāʾiq),**

Ḥadāʾiq is the plural of *ḥadīqah*, which has been defined as "walled garden, enclosed orchard." *Ghulb* is the plural of *ghalbāʾ*, which is used as an adjective for large and sturdy trees. The verse describes gardens that contain massive and thick trees.

وَ فاكِهَةً وَ أَبًّا ﴿٣١﴾

(80:31) ***fruits*** **(fākihah)** ***and pastures*** **(abban),**

Abb means "pasture, grazing land." Here are a few views concerning the word *fākihah*: (1) It means "fruits" in general. (2) It includes all fruits except grape and pomegranate. (3) The explicit mention of some fruits in the previous verses—such as olives and date palms—indicates special attention to their value and status [otherwise, *fākihah* includes all fruits].

مَتاعاً لَكُمْ وَ لِأَنْعامِكُمْ ﴿٣٢﴾

(80:32) ***as a sustenance for you and for your livestock.***

This verse presents the intended object (*mafʿūl lahu*) of the previous verses. The meaning is: "We planted what we planted—the food that you consume—so that it may be a means of sustenance for you and for the livestock in your possession."

There is a shift of address from the third person to the second person in this verse, which underlines God's favor upon humankind in His direction of their affairs, and/or the blessings that He has bestowed upon them.

فَإِذا جاءَتِ الصَّاخَّةُ ﴿٣٣﴾

(80:33) ***So when the deafening Cry*** **(al-ṣākhkhah)** ***comes***

Ṣākhkhah means "an intense cry that deafens the ears due to its intensity." What is meant here is the blowing of Trumpet. This verse presents the ending point of God's universal direction of human affairs. Part of His direction of their affairs is the command to serve Him, which humans either fulfill or not. That will end in the Day of Resurrection, when every

person will receive the result of their actions in full measure.

يَوْمَ يَفِرُّ الْمَرْءُ مِنْ أَخِيهِ ﴿٣٤﴾ وَ أُمِّهِ وَ أَبِيهِ ﴿٣٥﴾ وَ صاحِبَتِهِ وَ بَنِيهِ ﴿٣٦﴾

(80:34-36) ***—the day when a man will evade his brother, his mother and his father, his spouse and his sons—***

These verses reflect the severity of that day. They mention the closest relatives of a person, who would naturally be a source of support for the person, to whom one would recourse for assistance, and with whom one would feel at peace. However, on the Day of Resurrection one would run away from the same people because the person is completely preoccupied with oneself and enveloped by calamity. One will be so engaged with one's own predicament that they will not have the chance to attend to anyone else, whomsoever that may be. When difficult times escalate in intensity and overpower the person, they completely absorb the person to themselves, and divert them from everyone and everything else. This idea can be confirmed with the next verse.

لِكُلِّ امْرِئٍ مِنْهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ شَأْنٌ يُغْنِيهِ ﴿٣٧﴾

(80:37) ***that day each of them will have a task to keep him preoccupied.***

That is, each person's position and circumstance is a sufficient engagement for them, such that they cannot turn to anything else. Exegetes have offered other explanations for why one would evade their relatives and near ones. Since there is no evidence for their views, we will not present them.

وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ مُسْفِرَةٌ ﴿٣٨﴾ ضاحِكَةٌ مُسْتَبْشِرَةٌ ﴿٣٩﴾

(80:38-39) ***That day some faces will be bright*** **(musfirah, from isfār),** ***laughing and joyous*** **(mustabshirah, from istibshār).**

These verses [to the end of the chapter] describe how people will be divided into two groups on that day: the felicitous and the wretched. Each group can be known through the expression on their face.

When used for the face, the word isfār means "brightness and resplendence" due to joy and happiness. Similarly, their faces will be beaming and radiant (*mustabshirah*) as a result of observing glad tidings (*bushrá*).

وَ وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَلَيْها غَبَرَةٌ ﴿٤٠﴾

(80:40) ***And some faces on that day will be covered with dust*** **(ghabarah),**

Ghabarah means "dust and darkness" on the face, which is an expression of grief and sorrow.

تَرْهَقُها قَتَرَةٌ ﴿٤١﴾

(80:41) ***overcast with gloom.***

Blackness and darkness will overcast and envelop them. The last four verses [80:38-41] describe the state of each group by describing their facial expressions and complexions. This is because the face is a mirror of the heart, in the sense that it reflects the joy or sorrow in one's heart.

أُولٰئِكَ هُمُ الْكَفَرَةُ الْفَجَرَةُ ﴿٤٢﴾

(80:42) ***It is they who are the faithless, the vicious*** **(al-fajarah, from fujūr).**

They are those who combine in themselves lack of faith in terms of their beliefs, and reprehensible acts of disobedience in terms of their deeds. *Fujūr* means "detestable sin." Alternatively, they are those who are ungrateful to God's blessings, and who are mischief-mongers. This verse describes the second group of people on that day, which are the wretched. There is no equivalent description of the first group—the felicitous—because the context of the verses is that of warning and admonition. The verses specifically revolve around the case of the wretched.

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning *Perish man! How ungrateful is he!* (80:17) ʿIkrimah said: This verse was revealed with reference to ʿUtbat b. Abī Lahab, who said, "I don't believe in the Lord of *the star when it sets* (53:1)." Thus the Prophet cursed him, and he was devoured by a lion on his way to the Levant.[1]

(2) Concerning *Perish* (qutila) *man! How ungrateful is he!* (80:17)

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn al-Mundhir.

Imam ʿAlī said: It means curse be upon (*luʿina*)[1] man.[2]

(3) Concerning *Then He made the way easy for him* (80:20) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: He made the way to good easy for him.

Author's comment: This means that God has equipped humans with free will in their acts, such that they can pursue an easy course toward the happiness and perfection for which they have been created. Hence, the above account matches our interpretation of the verse.

(4) Concerning *and vegetables* (qaḍban) (80:28) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *Qaḍb* means fresh fodder.

(5) Concerning *fruits and pastures* (abban) (80:31) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *Abb* is hay for animals.

(6) Abū Bakr was once asked about the meaning of *abban* (80:31). "Which heaven would protect me under its shade," he said, "and which land would host me if I were to say something that I don't know concerning the Book of God?"[3]

(7) Once ʿUmar recited on the pulpit: *and made the grain grow in it, and vines and vegetables… and pastures* (abban) (80:27-31), and said: "We know all of these [words], but what is *abb*?" Then he dropped the staff he was holding in his hand, and said, "By God this would be an unwarranted contrivance and imposition [of meaning]. What happens if you don't know what is *abb*?[4] Follow those instructions of God's Book which have been clarified to you. Act upon those, and defer what you don't know to its [the Qur'an's] Lord."[5]

(8) Once a man asked ʿUmar about the meaning of *abban* (80:31). When ʿUmar saw the people offering their views on it, he took

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1 That is, "May man be far from God's mercy." In this context, this is an expression of frustration and disappointment. (Ed.)

2 *Al-Iḥtijāj*, as a part of a longer hadith.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Abū ʿUbayd's *al-Faḍāʾil*, on the authority of Ibrāhīm al-Tīmī.

4 In other words: "Whether you know its meaning or not does not make any difference in your life." Or alternatively: "You will not be held accountable for not knowing its meaning." (Ed.)

5 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Saʿīd b. Manṣūr, Ibn Jarīr, ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Mardawayh, al-Bayhaqī's *Shuʿab al-īmān*, al-Khaṭīb and al-Ḥākim (who has authenticated it), on the authority of Anas.

out his whip.[1]

Author's comment: This implies prohibiting the people from discussing the teachings of the Qur'an, even to the extent of defining its vocabulary.

(9) Abū Bakr was once asked about the verse, *fruits* (fākihah) *and pastures* (abban) (80:31), but he did not know the meaning of *abb* in the Qur'an. So he said, "Which heaven would protect me under its shade, which land would host me, and what should I do, if I were to say something that I don't know concerning the Book of God? We know the meaning of *fākihah*, but God knows best what is *abb*."

When the news of this reached Imam ʿAlī, he said, "Glory be to God! How could he not realize that *abb* means pasture and fodder? When the Almighty God says, *fruits and pastures* (80:31), He is listing His blessings upon His creatures regarding the food that He has provided and created for them, and also for their livestock.[2] He is describing what sustains their lives and energizes their bodies."[3]

(10) The Prophet's wife Sūdah said: The Messenger of God said, "People shall be resurrected barefooted, naked and uncircumcised. Perspiration will bridle them and reach their earlobes."

"What a misery, O Messenger of God!" I exclaimed. "Does it mean that people will see each other [naked] on that day?"

"They will be too busy to notice that," he replied. Then the Messenger of God recited: *that day each of them will have a task to keep him preoccupied* (80:37).[4]

(11) Concerning *that day each of them will have a task to keep him preoccupied* (80:37) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: [They will have] an engagement that will divert them from everything else.

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, on the authority of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Yazīd.

2 Therefore, verse 80:32 interprets verse 80:31: *a sustenance for you* (80:32) corresponds to *fākihah* (80:31), *and for your livestock* (80:32) corresponds to *abban* (80:31). (Ed.)

3 Mufīd's *al-Irshād*.

4 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of ʿAṭāʾ b. Yasār.

Chapter 81

al-Takwīr (The Winding Up)

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Verses 1-14

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful.

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 29 verses. It reminds the audience about the Day of Resurrection by discussing some of the events that will occur immediately before it. That is a day when everyone will be shown everything that they have done in their lifetime. The chapter then describes the Qur'an as being a divine revelation imparted to the Prophet through a heavenly envoy, which is the angel of revelation. It is not a Satanic inspirations. Nor is the Prophet a lunatic who has been contacted by the Devil.

This chapter is seemingly one of the earliest chapters that were revealed at the outset of the Prophet's mission (called *al-ʿatāʾiq*). This can be deduced from its vindication of the Prophet from the allegation of insanity. People used to charge him with this at the beginning of his mission. The same vindication is seen in Sūrah Nūn [68:2], which was revealed at the outset of the Prophetic mission. The chapter is Meccan beyond any doubt.

إِذَا الشَّمْسُ كُوِّرَتْ ﴿١﴾

(81:1) ***When the sun is wound up*** **(kuwwirat, from takwīr)**

Takwīr means "rolling and wrapping in a circular manner," like how a turban is wrapped around the head. Perhaps it is used metaphorically here to describe the sun being wrapped by darkness.

وَإِذَا النُّجُومُ انْكَدَرَتْ ﴿٢﴾

(81:2) ***when the stars fall*** **(inkadarat, from inkidār),**

Inkidār is used when a bird swoops down toward the earth. Therefore,

what is meant here is the disintegration of the heavenly bodies, as reflected in the verse: *When the stars are scattered* (82:2). Another possible meaning is that *inkidār* means "darkening." In that case, the verse is about the stars fading and losing their brightness.

وَإِذَا الْجِبَالُ سُيِّرَتْ ﴿٣﴾

(81:3) ***when the mountains are set moving,***

The mountains will move as a result of the quake upon the Hour, will be demolished into scattered dust [56:5-6], and will become a mirage [78:20], as mentioned elsewhere in the Qur'an.[1]

وَإِذَا الْعِشَارُ عُطِّلَتْ ﴿٤﴾

(81:4) ***when the pregnant camels*** **(ʿishār)** ***are neglected,***

It is said that *ʿishār* is the plural of *ʿusharāʾ*, much like *nifās* being the plural of *nufasāʾ* (pregnant woman). *ʿAshrāʾ* denotes "a she-camel between its tenth month of pregnancy and its delivery." It is also applied to such a camel after giving birth. Either way, such a camel was a very valuable asset to Arabs. Nevertheless, upon the Hour, such camels will be neglected and abandoned, without anyone to look after them. This a metaphorical expression, showing that the most cherished properties—for which people tend to compete—will be left unattended, without anyone claiming ownership over them. That is because everyone on that day will be preoccupied with themselves, and thus unable to attend to anything else. God says: *that day each of them will have a task to keep him preoccupied* (80:37).

وَإِذَا الْوُحُوشُ حُشِرَتْ ﴿٥﴾

(81:5) ***when the wild beasts*** **(wuḥūsh)** ***are mustered,***

Wuḥūsh is the plural of *waḥsh*, which means "an animal that cannot be domesticated." The verse appears in a context of verses which describe the Day of Resurrection. Hence, it apparently implies that the beasts will be resurrected just like humans. This can be confirmed by the verse: *There is no animal on land, nor a bird that flies with its wings, but they are communities like yourselves. We have not omitted anything from the Book. Then*

1 See verses 18:47, 20:105-107, 27:88, 52:10, 69:14, 70:9, 73:14, 77:10, 101:5. (Ed.)

they will be mustered toward their Lord (6:38). However, what happens to them afterwards is not mentioned in the Qur'an. Nor is it discussed in any of the reliable narrations. Perhaps some of their fate can be deduced—by a discerning thinker—from the expression: *they are communities like yourselves. We have not omitted anything from the Book* (6:38).

Another suggested meaning is that the verse describes one of the events prior to the Day of Resurrection. What is meant here is that they will come out of their dens and woods.[1]

وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ سُجِّرَتْ ﴿٦﴾

(81:6) *when the seas are set afire* (sujjirat, from tasjīr),

There are two suggested definitions for *tasjīr*: (1) "Setting something on fire." (2) "Filling something." Accordingly, there are two possible meanings for the verse: (1) "When the seas will be set ablaze." (2) "When the seas will be filled [in spate and overflow]."[2]

وَإِذَا النُّفُوسُ زُوِّجَتْ ﴿٧﴾

(81:7) *when the souls are coupled,*

Happy souls will be coupled with heavenly spouses: *In it there will be pure mates for them* (2:25, 4:57); *And We will wed them to wide-eyed houris* (44:54, 52:20). And wretched souls will be coupled with devils as their eternal mates and companions: *Muster the wrongdoers and their mates and what they used to serve* (37:22); *Whoever turns a blind eye to the remembrance of the All-Merciful, We assign him a devil who remains his companion* (43:36).

وَإِذَا الْمَوْءُودَةُ سُئِلَتْ ﴿٨﴾ بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ ﴿٩﴾

be asked for what sin she was killed.

Maw'ūdah means "a girl who is buried alive." It was a custom among Arabs to bury their girls alive to avoid facing any potential disgrace because of them. This is reflected in these verses: *When one of them is brought the*

1 In other words, the end of the world will be accompanied with a frenzied stampede of animals. (Ed.)

2 Based on verse 82:3 (below), the author favors the second meaning. (Ed.)

news of a female [newborn], his face becomes darkened and he chokes with suppressed agony. He hides from the people out of distress at the news he has been brought: shall he retain it in humiliation, or bury it in the ground (16:58-59).

The real person who will be held accountable and given punishment for this will be the father who buried the girl. The verse's expression—where the girl is questioned—is a way of reprimanding the murderer. This kind of questioning sets the stage for the victim to file a grievance to God against her murderer, so that God would ask her murderer about it and take her vengeance. This way of expression is similar to how God will question Prophet Jesus: *And when Allah will say, "O Jesus son of Mary! Was it you who said to the people, 'Take me and my mother for gods besides Allah?"* (5:116).

Another suggested possibility is that the verse's expression is figurative. What is meant is that the buried girl will be asked *about*, much like the verse: *Indeed all covenants are accountable* (17:34).[1]

وَإِذَا الصُّحُفُ نُشِرَتْ ﴿١٠﴾

(81:10) ***When the records are unfolded,***

This is about the records of deeds. They will be unfolded for reckoning and accounts.

وَإِذَا السَّمَاءُ كُشِطَتْ ﴿١١﴾

(81:11) ***when the sky is stripped off*** **(kushiṭat, from kashṭ),**

According to *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, the word *kashṭ* means "ripping away two things that are tightly bound together." This amounts to the rolling up of the heavens, as mentioned in these verses: *and the heavens, scrolled, in His right hand* (39:67); *The day when the sky with its clouds will split open, and the angels will be sent down [in a majestic] descent* (25:25).

وَإِذَا الْجَحِيمُ سُعِّرَتْ ﴿١٢﴾

(81:12) ***when hell is set ablaze*** **(suʿʿirat, from tasʿīr),**

1 God will not ask the covenants, but will ask the people *about* the covenants. The same logic is applicable to the current verse. (Ed.)

Tasʿīr means "setting the fire aflame, stirring the fire until it flames."

وَإِذَا الْجَنَّةُ أُزْلِفَتْ ﴿١٣﴾

(81:13) *when paradise is brought near* (uzlifat, from izlāf),

Izlāf means "bringing close." Paradise will be brought close to its inhabitants to enter.[1]

عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَا أَحْضَرَتْ ﴿١٤﴾

(81:14) *then a soul shall know what it has readied [for itself]* (aḥḍarat).

This verse is the complement of the word "when" (*idhā*) in the previous verses. *Soul* is meant in its generic sense [including all humans]. *What it has readied* refers to the actions that one has performed. *Aḥḍartuhu* means "I found it present," just as *aḥmadtuhu* means "I found it agreeable." Accordingly, the verse is comparable to the verse: *The day when every soul will find present whatever good it has done; and whatever evil* (3:30).

Examining Narrations

(1) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *When the sun is wound up* (81:1): It will turn pitch-black. *When the stars fall* (81:2): Their light will fade away. *When the mountains are set moving* (81:3): They will move, as God says: *And you see the mountains, which you suppose to be stationary, while they drift like passing clouds* (27:88). *When the pregnant camels are neglected* (81:4): The camels will be deserted since people have died, so there will be no one to milk them. *When the seas are set afire* (81:6): The seas that encompass the entire world will turn into fire. *When the souls are coupled* (81:7): They will be wed with wide-eyed houris.

(2) Concerning *when the souls are coupled* (81:7) Imam al-Bāqir said: "The dwellers of paradise will be coupled with *maidens good and lovely* (55:70). As with the inhabitants of hell, there will be a devil for each one of them." That is, the souls of disbelievers and hypocrites will be coupled with devils. Thus they will be peers and

1 Also see verses 26:90 and 50:31. (Ed.)

companions [to each other].[1]

Author's comment: Apparently the subsequent part of the narration—"That is, the souls…"—was added by one of the transmitters.

(3) The Prophet said: *When the sun is wound up* (81:1): It will wind up in hell. *When the stars fall* (81:2): They will darken [or fall] in hell. Similarly, anyone who was worshiped beside God will be in hell, except for Jesus son of Mary and his mother. Even they would enter therein if they were to be pleased with being worshiped.[2]

(4) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *when the records are unfolded* (81:10): That is the records of deeds. *When the sky is stripped off* (kushiṭat) (81:11): It [*kushiṭat*] means *ubṭilat* (abolished, abrogated, cancelled).

(5) Concerning *when the souls are coupled* (81:7) the Messenger of God said: That is two individuals who participate in the same act: they will enter paradise or hell together.[3]

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1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim and al-Daylamī, on the authority of Abū Maryam.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Nuʿmān b. Bashīr.

Verses 15-29

These verses discuss the following points: (1) The Prophet is free from insanity, which the people had charged him with. (2) The revelations of Qur'an—which he brought—is free from Satanic intervention. (3) The Qur'an is the word of the Almighty God. (4) The Qur'an is communicated to the Prophet through the angel of revelation, who is faithful in his mission. (5) The Qur'an is a reminder to all nations. (6) It guides anyone who seeks guidance, by God's leave.

فَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِالْخُنَّسِ ﴿١٥﴾ الْجَوَارِ الْكُنَّسِ ﴿١٦﴾

(81:15-16) ***So I swear by the stars that return*** **(bil-khunnas),** ***the planets*** **(al-jawārī, al-jawār)** ***that hide*** **(al-kunnas)*!***

Khunnas is the plural of *khānis*, just as *ṭullab* is the plural form of *ṭālib* (seeker, demander, applicant). It is derived from *khunūs*, which means "contracting, retreating, delaying, camouflaging." *Jawārī* is the plural of *jāriyah*, derived from *jary*, which means "moving rapidly." It is a metaphorical usage that is taken from the flow (*jary*) of water. *Kunnas* is the plural of *kānis*, derived from *kunūs*, which is used when a wild animal—like a deer or a bird—enters and settles in its *kināṣ* (nest, home, lair).

The next two verses—*And by the night as it draws! And by the dawn as it breathes* (81:17-18)—clarify that what is meant here—by *khunnas*, which is interpreted as *jawārī kunnas*—is heavenly bodies, either all of them or some of them. Nevertheless, the movements of some of them fit the descriptions in these verses better, and those are the five planets: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus and Mercury. Their movements, as observed [from the earth], exhibit the three stages of prograde motion (*istiqāmah*), retrograde motion (*rajʿah*) and stagnation (*iqāmah*). There are times when a planet appears to move in the same direction as the earth [that is, west-to-east relative to the stars]. That is its prograde motion. Then for some time it appears to move backwards [that is, east-to-west relative to the stars]. That is its retrograde motion, which would be its *khunūs* (contraction, retreating). Finally, there are times when a planet seems to be stationary [relative to the earth's motion], much like a wild animal that takes recourse to its den (*kināṣ*).

Here are two other suggested meanings:

(1) The verses are about all heavenly bodies. Their stage of *khunūs* (return) is when they disappear in daylight. Their stage of *jary* (flowing) is their visible motion during the night. Their stage of *kunūs* (hiding) is when they set, wherever they set.

(2) The verses are about buffaloes or deer.

Comment: In the last view, apparently what is meant is all wild animals, where two are mentioned specifically for illustration. Either way, the view we offered above is the most plausible. The first suggested view is slightly less convincing than our interpretation, and the second suggested view is even less apparent than the first.

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا عَسْعَسَ ﴿١٧﴾

(81:17) ***And by the night as it draws*** **(ʿasʿasa)*!***

ʿAsʿasah is used for both the advance and the retreat of the night.[1] Al-Rāghib says:

> *By the night as it* ʿasʿasa means "as it draws in and draws back." This corresponds to the beginning and the end of the night. Therefore, *ʿasʿasah* and *ʿisās* denote the dimness at dawn and twilight.

Given the next verse—*By the dawn as it breathes* (81:18)—it is more plausible to interpret the current verse as referring to the end of night. Some have interpreted it as the beginning of the night, but this is unlikely given what we said.

وَالصُّبْحِ إِذَا تَنَفَّسَ ﴿١٨﴾

(81:18) ***And by the dawn as it breathes!***

The verse's expression is metaphorical.[2] The "breathing of the morning" refers to the spreading of light across the horizons, whereby the pervading darkness is removed. The night encompasses the horizons after a day of weariness from hard work. That creates some time to rest. Then upon the

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1 The conjunction "And" at the beginning of the verse connects it to the previous vow: *by the stars that return* (81:15). *As it draws* is a qualification for *the night*. (Auth.)

2 The conjunction "And" at the beginning of the verse connect it to the previous vow: *by the stars that return* (81:15). *As it breathes* is a qualification for *the dawn*. (Auth.)

next morning, it is as though the day starts breathing again by shedding light on all horizons. This is what we infer from some exegetes.

Another view is that of al-Zamakhsharī, who says in *al-Kashshāf*:

> One may ask: "What is the meaning of the dawn's breathing?" The answer is: When the dawn appears, it comes with a refreshing wind and breeze, which is figuratively called the breath of morning.

Comment: The previous meaning springs to the mind first.

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ ﴿١٩﴾ ذِى قُوَّةٍ عِنْدَ ذِى الْعَرْشِ مَكِينٍ ﴿٢٠﴾ مُطَاعٍ ثَمَّ أَمِينٍ ﴿٢١﴾

(81:19-21) ***It is indeed the speech of a noble messenger, powerful and eminent with the Lord of the Throne, one who is heard there, and is trustworthy.***

The pronoun *it* (81:19) refers to the entire Qur'an, or to the verses of this chapter specifically, in the sense that they are part of the Qur'an. This can be deduced from the subsequent description: *the speech of a noble messenger*… The messenger intended here is Gabriel, as identified in the verse: *Say, "Whoever is an enemy of Gabriel [should know that] it is he who has brought it down on your heart with the will of Allah"* (2:97).

The verse ascribes *the speech* to Gabriel as a messenger. This shows that the speech's relation to Gabriel is that of a message to the messenger. Otherwise, it is God's speech. The verses praise Gabriel with six qualities:

(1) *Messenger*. He is an envoy of revelation, who communicates the Qur'an to the Prophet.
(2) *Noble*. God has honored him and blessed him with a high rank.
(3) *Powerful*. He is possessed of great strength and influence.
(4) *Eminent* (makīn, from makānah) *with the Lord of the Throne*. He has *makānah* in the view of God, where *makānah* means "proximity and rank."
(5) *One who is heard there*. "There" means in the divine realm. This shows that Gabriel has authority over other angels. He has assistants among other angels who follow his orders.
(6) *Trustworthy*. He never betrays the commands given to him. He communicates the revelation and mission that is imparted to him without any distortion or manipulation.

Some have said that the *messenger* mentioned here is the Prophet. However, this view is discordant with the subsequent verses.

وَمَا صَاحِبُكُمْ بِمَجْنُونٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

(81:22) ***And your companion is not insane.***

This verse denies the people's allegation of madness against the Prophet.[1] It is said that referring to the Prophet as *your companion* serves to exonerate the Prophet of their allegation of insanity. Saying that he is *your companion* suggests that he has lived his life amongst you. Hence, you know him very well. You have certainly found his reason to be complete, his views to be reliable, and his speech to be truthful. Given these qualities, one cannot call him insane.

The previous verses praised Gabriel by qualities that are not mentioned for the Prophet. This does not imply that Gabriel is superior to the Prophet because the main theme of these verses is to demonstrate that the Qur'an is the word of God. The context of the verses is about the Prophet receiving the Qur'an through divine revelation, not through insane illusions that are the doings of the Devil. What is instrumental to proving this point is to assure the audience about the impeccability of the channel through which the message is delivered. That is why the verses must focus on the envoy of revelation, enumerate his noble traits, and announce him clear of any mistake or treachery. However, the qualities of the receiver of the message [that is, Prophet Muḥammad] are not directly related to this purpose. What is needed with regards to him is to clear his record from the allegation of insanity. As mentioned above, referring to him as *your companion* proves this point. This is what the exegetes have said.

Based on the Prophet's noble qualities mentioned elsewhere in the Qur'an, there remains no doubt that he was superior to all angels. After all, God made all angels to prostrate before the human being, who is His vicegerent on earth.

وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ بِالْأُفُقِ الْمُبِينِ ﴿٢٣﴾

(81:23) ***Certainly he saw him on the manifest horizon,***

1 The conjunction "and" connects this verse to *it is indeed the speech…* (81:19). (Auth.)

The pronoun "he" refers to *companion* (81:22). The pronoun "him" refers to *noble messenger* (81:19). *Manifest horizon* means "apparent region." It is apparently the same as: *While he was on the highest horizon* (53:7). The meaning is: "I swear that the Prophet saw Gabriel while Gabriel was on the manifest horizon, which is a horizon that is above the other horizons." That would correspond to the angelic world.

Another suggested meaning is: "The Prophet saw Gabriel in his original form at the rising point of the sun, which is the highest horizon in the east." The problem with this view is that there is no evidence for it in the text of the verse, especially for the idea of seeing him in his original form, or in any other form that he may have taken. Apparently this interpretation is deduced from some narrations which say that the Prophet saw Gabriel at the outset of his mission, seated on a throne between the heaven and the earth. This should be interpreted as *tamaththul* (appearance, resemblance, representation) [not as Gabriel's original form].[1]

وَمَا هُوَ عَلَى الْغَيْبِ بِضَنِينٍ ﴿٢٤﴾

(81:24) ***and he is not miserly (ḍanīn) concerning the Unseen.***

The antecedent of the pronoun "he" is the Prophet. *The Unseen* means the message that is revealed to him. *Ḍanīn* is a *ṣifah mushabbahah* derived from *ḍann*, which is synonymous with *bukhl* (stinginess, parsimony, niggardliness).[2] The meaning is: "The Prophet is not stingy with regard to anything that is revealed to him. That is, he does not conceal, withhold or alter it; neither entirely nor partially. Rather, he teaches the people just as he is taught by God, and communicates to them what he has been ordered to convey."

وَمَا هُوَ بِقَوْلِ شَيْطَانٍ رَجِيمٍ ﴿٢٥﴾

(81:25) ***And it is not the speech of an outcast Satan*** **(shayṭān).**

This verse negates identifying the Qur'an's with a Satanic

1 See volume 27, pp. 45ff of the English translation. (Ed.)

2 A *ṣifah mushabbahah* (also called *ṣifah mushbihah*) is an adjective that is similar to an active participle (*ism al-fāʿil*). It serves as an adjective, and indicates the establishment, subsistence, and strength of a quality in the subject. In this case it means "firmly rooted in miserliness." (Ed.)

communication. A Satanic influence [mentioned in this verse] is broader than insanity [mentioned in verse 81:22]. The original meaning of the word *shayṭān* (Satan, devil) is *sharīr* (malicious being, evil creature). Thus the term has been used in the Qur'an not only for Iblīs and his progeny, but also for other mischievous jinns. Likewise, the adjective *rajīm* (outcast) is applied in other Qur'anic verses to others besides Iblīs. *He said, "Begone hence, for you are indeed an outcast"* (15:34, 38:77); *and We have guarded them from every outcast Satan* (15:17). The meaning is: "The Qur'an is neither a result of temptations from Iblīs and his hosts, nor an inspiration of mischievous jinns who possess the lunatics."

فَأَيْنَ تَذْهَبُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

(81:26) ***So where are you going?***

In the last seven verses [81:19-25], despite their brevity, God stated the fact of the matter with respect to the Qur'an, and clarified any doubts that the audience may have had, such as the Prophet being accused of insanity. The verses clarified four points:

(1) The Qur'an is the word of God. This point hinges on verses which challenge the people to bring the like of it.[1]

(2) The Qur'an has been communicated to the Prophet by a heavenly angel who has a high rank and a lofty position. That is Gabriel, who is trustworthy over divine revelations. There is no veil between him and God, nor between him and the Prophet. He has no internal or external impediments from receiving, preserving and conveying the message.

(3) The person receiving and communicating the Qur'an is your companion, whom you know very well. He is not insane as they accuse him. He saw the angel of revelation and received the message from him. He neither conceals nor alters what has been revealed to him.

(4) The Qur'an is not a temptation of Iblīs and his host. Nor is it a communication from some mischievous jinns.

The conclusion of the above points is that the Qur'an is a book of guidance for anyone who is determined to pursue the truth. This conclusion is mentioned in the following verses: *It is but a reminder for all the nations…* (81:27ff). The current verse—*So where are you going?*—paves

1 See verses 2:23, 10:38, 11:13, 17:88, 28:49. (Ed.)

the ground for the upcoming conclusion to the previous discussion. The verse condemns how they view the Qur'an—as a fit of insanity or a false Satanic communication. The verse is a rhetorical question which implies censure and rebuke. The meaning is: "Given the above facts, where are you heading? Why are you turning your backs to the truth?"

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إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢٧﴾

(81:27) ***It is but a reminder for all the nations,***

It is a means of remembrance and admonition for all people, wherever they may be. It enables them to see the truth. We discussed this verse under other similar verses.[1]

لِمَنْ شَاءَ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ يَسْتَقِيمَ ﴿٢٨﴾

(81:28) ***for those of you who will to be steadfast;***

This verse interprets, qualifies and substitutes *for all the nations* (81:27). The meaning is: "Benefitting from this reminder will be actualized for those who have this condition: They must be willing to remain steadfastness in the truth, which means persisting with servitude and obedience [to God]."

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وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

(81:29) ***but you do not will unless it is willed by Allah***

Given the context, this verse is a response to an implied misconception (called a prolepsis). One may interpret the last verse—*for those of you who will to be steadfast* (81:28)—as implying that people are independent in their volition: they can be steadfast if they wish, and they can be not steadfast if they do not so desire. This would mean that God would depend on them in the steadfastness which He demands from them. This verse refutes that notion by clarifying that the people's volition depends on God's will. They would not will to be steadfast unless God wills that they should will so. This means that the voluntary acts of humans are themselves willed by God. Here is how God's will works: God has willed that person so-and-so would act in such-and-such a way *through their volition*. We discussed the

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1 See verses 12:104, 38:78, 68:52. Also see volume 14, p. 27 of the English translation, under verse 6:90. (Ed.)

verse's meaning under other similar verses.[1]

Examining Narrations

(1) [Imam] ʿAlī said concerning *So I swear by the stars that return* (bil-khunnas) (81:15): This verse describes the stars: they return (*taknisu*) at night, but disappear (*takhnisu*) during the day and cannot be seen.[2]

(2) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *So I swear by the stars that return* (bil-khunnas) (85:15): It means I swear by the *khunnas*, which is a name for the stars. *The planets that hide* (al-kunnas) (81:16): These are stars that disappear (*taknisu*) during the day and are not manifest.

(3) Imam ʿAlī said: *Al-khunnas* (81:15) are the stars which hide during the day and appear at night. *Al-jawār* (81:16) is an adjective for the stars, since they flow in their orbits. *Al-kunnas* (81:16) is another adjective for them, because they hide and disappear (*taknisu*) in their constellations, just as the deer hide in their dens (*kināṣ*). They are the five heavenly bodies: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus and Mercury.[3]

(4) Imam ʿAlī said concerning *And by the night as it draws* (81:17): It means when it retreats with its darkness.[4]

(5) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *And by the night as it draws* (81:17): It means as it [the night] falls. *And by the dawn as it breathes* (81:18): It means as it [the morning] rises.

(6) The Messenger of God said to Gabriel, "So beautifully has your Lord praised you: *powerful and eminent with the Lord of the Throne, one who is heard there, and is trustworthy* (81:20-21). So

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1 See verse 80:20 above, verse 111:5 below, and number 3 under Chapter 91's examination of narrations. Also see volume 1, pp. 143 and 162ff of the English translation, under verses 2:21-25 and 2:26-27; volume 2, pp. 209ff and 271-272, under verses 2:153-157 and 2:164; volume 13, pp. 25ff and 81ff, under verses 6:9 and 6:35; volume 15, p. 65, under verses 7:10-25; volume 39, p. 160, under verse 74:56; p. 200, under verse 76:3; pp. 233-234 under verse 76:30. (Ed.)

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Saʿīd b. Manṣūr, al-Fāryābī, ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Ḥākim (who has authenticated it), through multiple chains of narration.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

4 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

how was your power, and how was your trustworthiness?"
"As with my power," Gabriel replied, "I was sent to the cities of Lot [to exterminate them]. They were four cities, each with 400,000 soldiers, besides the civilians. I hoisted them from the lowest earth to the point where the inhabitants of the heavens could hear the clucks of their chicken and the howls of their dogs. Then I thrust them, whereby I killed them. As with my trustworthiness, I have never transgressed anything that I have been commanded."[1]

Author's comment: This account is not free from problem. The scholars have deemed Ibn ᶜAsākir's narrations to be weak, especially when he is the only transmitter.

(7) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: "Whoever says every day in [the month of] Shaᶜbān, 'I ask forgiveness from God—but Whom there is no God, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful, the Ever-Living, the All-Upright—and repent to Him (*astaghfir Allāh alladhī lā ilāh illā huwa al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm al-Ḥayy al-Qayyūm wa atūbu ilayhi*),' their name will be inscribed in *the manifest horizon* (81:23)."
He was asked, "What is the manifest horizon?"
He explained: "It is a place in front of the Throne, where rivers flow, with as many goblets as there are stars."[2]

(8) Concerning *And it is not the speech of an outcast Satan* (81:25) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: This refers to the shamans and soothsayers among the Quraysh. Their speech is equated with the speech of the devils who were with them since the devils used to speak with their tongues. So it says: *And it is not the speech of an outcast Satan* (81:25), which means similar to their[3] speech.[4]

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn ᶜAsākir, on the authority of Muᶜāwiyah b. Qurrah.

2 *Al-Khiṣāl*.

3 The pronoun "their" can refer to either the human shamans, or the devils which inspired them. (Ed.)

4 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*.

Chapter 82

al-Infiṭār (The Cleaving)

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Verses 1-19

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful.

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 19 verses. It describes the Day of Resurrection by enumerating some of the events that will inevitably occur just before it. It also discusses what occurs on that day, namely the people being reminded of everything that they have done from the beginning to the end, including both good deeds and evil ones. Their actions are all recorded by the guardian angels who are placed in charge of each person. Each person's retribution will be according to their action: If their deeds were good, then they will be heading for bliss; and if they were wrongdoers and deniers, they will end up in hell and abide therein forever. The chapter then makes a transition to another description of the Day of Resurrection: it is a day when no one will be in charge of anything for anyone; all affairs will be up to God on that day. This [last verse] is among the key verses (*ghurar al-āyāt*) of the Qur'an.[1] The chapter is Meccan beyond any doubt.

إِذَا السَّمَاءُ انْفَطَرَتْ ﴿١﴾

(82:1) *When the sky is rent apart* (infaṭarat, from infiṭār),

Faṭr is synonymous with *shaqq* (split, crack, tear), and *infiṭār* means *inshiqāq* (splitting, ripping, rending). The verse can be compared to: *and the sky will be split open—for it will be frail that day* (69:16).

1 The author considers some verses of the Qur'an to be *ghurar* (outstanding, brilliant). These are verses which go beyond their context of discussion and provide the audience with fundamental principles that define the Qur'anic world view and value system. (Ed.)

وَإِذَا الْكَوَاكِبُ انْتَثَرَتْ ﴿٢﴾

(82:2) ***when the stars are scattered,***

They will disperse and leave the positions that were assigned to them. Heavenly bodies are compared to threaded beads, where the string is broken and the beads scatter.

وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ فُجِّرَتْ ﴿٣﴾

(82:3) ***when the seas are merged*** **(fujjirat, from tafjīr),**

Majmaᶜ al-bayān says:

> *Tafjīr* is when water transgresses from one container to another due to abundance and overflow. Sin is called *fujūr* because it is when the person transgresses [the boundaries of God's obedience] into sinning. Dawn or daybreak is called *fajr* since it involves an explosion (*infijār*) of light.

This can be a basis for what some exegetes have said: What is meant here is that the different bodies of water will open and merge into one another. The barrier between them will be removed, such that the potable and salty waters will mix. Hence, they will turn into a single ocean.

Based on this meaning, it is more appropriate to interpret the verse, *when the seas are set afire* (81:6) as follows "When the seas will be filled to the point of eruption and overflow."[1]

وَإِذَا الْقُبُورُ بُعْثِرَتْ ﴿٤﴾

(82:4) ***when the graves are overturned*** **(buᶜthirat),**

Majmaᶜ al-bayān says:

> When one makes the bottom part of a pool or a pond to come to the top, one uses the verbs *baᶜthartu* and *baḥthartu*. *Baᶜtharah* and *baḥtharah* mean "revolutionizing something by turning it upside down or inside out."

The meaning is: "When the graves are overturned, such that their insides appear." That amounts to raising the dead and gathering them for retribution.

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1 In other words, *tasjīr* in verse 81:6 does not mean "setting on fire." (Ed.)

عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَا قَدَّمَتْ وَأَخَّرَتْ ۝٥

(82:5) ***then a soul shall know what it has sent before and sent after.***

What is meant here is an elaborate and detailed knowledge about everything that one has committed in this world. That is different from the knowledge that one will acquire when the records of deeds are unrolled. It is an inherent knowledge that one carries with oneself, as mentioned in these verses: *Rather, man is very insightful over himself, though he may tender his excuses* (75:14-15); *the day when man will remember what he has striven* (79:35); *The day when every soul will find present whatever good it has done; and whatever evil* (3:30).

A soul is meant in a generic sense, which would include all humans. *What it has sent before and sent after* are, respectively, things that one does during one's life, and things that accrue to the person due to a good or evil custom that they establish during their life and are practiced after their death. God says: *We write what they have sent ahead and their effects [which they left behind]* (36:12).

Another suggested meaning for *what it has sent before and sent after* is: what one does at the beginning of one's life, and what one does at the end, respectively. This is a way of saying *all acts*.[1]

Exegetes have offered other views concerning *what it has sent before and sent after*, which are not plausible. Interested readers should refer to the extensive books of *tafsīr*. Our exposition of the verse, *so that Allah may separate the bad ones from the good* (8:37) could also be beneficial here.

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ مَا غَرَّكَ بِرَبِّكَ الْكَرِيمِ ۝٦

(82:6) ***O man! What dared you against your Gracious Lord,***

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1 That is, they will know the entire list of their acts, from top to bottom. When used in contradistinction with one another, *taqdīm* and *taʾkhīr* should be interpreted more literally, as "doing sooner" and "doing later," respectively. "Sending ahead" is applicable to other verses which only use *taqdīm*. This should also clarify what is meant in verse 48:2 and many narrations that use the same expression: They are not about "all sins that one *has committed* in the past and *will commit* in the future" but they are about "all sins that one has committed *so far*, from the very past up to the present." *Taqdīm* means what *was* done earlier, and *taʾkhīr* means what *was* done later (not what *will be* done later). (Ed.)

This verse and the next two verses have a tone of rebuke against *insān* (man, the human being). What is meant by this title here is not all humans, but those who deny the Day of Judgment, as we can deduce from what follows below: *Nay! Rather, you deny the retribution* (82:9). Denying the Day of Judgment implies rejecting and denying the religion, which in turn amounts to denying God's Lordship. Addressing such deniers by the general title of *insān* is itself an argument—or a semi-argument—against them. The title implies that they have been endowed with the special blessings which God bestows upon humankind as a whole.

The verse refers to God with the two divine qualities of Lordship and Grace. This usage strengthens the verse's rebuke and censure of the audience. First, He is the Lord, meaning One Who directs the affairs of the servants, and Who has enveloped them with His apparent and hidden blessings. Now, if a servant disobeys such a Master, anyone with a sound judgment would rule it to be wrong and worthy of punishment. Second, this beneficent Lord is Gracious, meaning One Who does not give blessings in order to make a personal gain, nor expects to be compensated by those whom He blesses. He gives generously, and forgives the mistakes that the servants commit out of ignorance. Now, if a servant is ungrateful to such a Master, that is even more reprehensible. Such behavior deserves a more intense and evident form of blame.

Hence, this verse is a rhetorical question which implies a rebuke. It reproaches the human being for a special form of ingratitude that cannot be justified or excused: being ungrateful to the blessings of a Gracious Lord.

Some exegetes have said: Describing the Lord as *Gracious* is a way of teaching the answer to the person, which itself is an act of grace. In other words, one would answer the above question by saying, "My Lord! It was Your grace that made me audacious."

This interpretation cannot be true, because the theme and context of the verses is that of warning and threat, as we read below: *and indeed the vicious shall be in hell entering it on the Day of Retribution, and they shall not be absent from it* (82:14-16). Nor can one give the above answer to God because God has made a firm decree and communicated it through the tongue of His messengers: *If you are grateful, I will surely enhance you [in blessing], but if you are ungrateful, My punishment is indeed severe* (14:7). He also says: *Then, as for him who transgressed, and preferred the life of this world, his abode will indeed be hell* (79:37-38). Likewise, there are many

other verses which explicitly say that transgressors will not have any way out of punishment, and will not benefit from divine grace on the Day of Resurrection. God says: *My mercy embraces all things. Therefore I shall prescribe it for those who are Godwary* (7:156). If it were sufficient for the sinners to say, "Your grace deceived me," then the punishment would not be directed at them in the first place, just as the believers are spared from it. There cannot be any excuse once the rules are clearly communicated.

الَّذِى خَلَقَكَ فَسَوَّاكَ فَعَدَلَكَ ۝٧

(82:7) *Who created you and proportioned you, and balanced you,*

This verse describes and interprets the previously mentioned Lordship of God, which is accompanied by grace. God's *tadbīr* (direction of affairs, management, regulation)[1] is elaborated in three stages: (1) He creates the human beings with all their organs. (2) He proportions them by placing each organ where it belongs based on a wise plan. (3) He balances them by creating harmony and synergy between their organs and faculties. As a result, when an organ cannot perform a certain function, it is covered by another organ. For instance, swallowing food is done by the mouth. However, the mouth is unable to chew, grind and crush the food. That function is done by the different types of teeth. That itself requires the movement of the food from one side to another side of the mouth, which is taken care of by the tongue. The mouth also requires the food to be placed in it. That is outsourced to the hand, which itself depends on the palm, the fingers and the joints, with all their diverse capabilities. In addition, the hand needs to be moved to obtain its food, whereby the legs come in to help.

A similar interdependence and equilibrium can be found in the functions of thousands and thousands of other organs and faculties that are beyond count. All of these are part of God's direction of affairs. He bestows these benefits not to make any gain for Himself. Nor does He stop His

1 This shows that the author has used *rubūbiyyah* (lordship) and *tadbīr* (direction) interchangeably, which can be verified with many other parts of *al-Mīzān*. God's Lordship is His direction of the affairs of His servants, and His management of the universe. Another possible meaning for *rubūbiyyah* is "ownership," which is also plausible based on its contradistinction with *ʿubūdiyyah* (servitude, slavery, bondage), and its linguistic usages. Thus the appropriateness of the English equivalent "Lord" for *Rabb*. (Ed.)

blessings when humans reciprocate by being ungrateful to them and forgetting to give thanks. Thus He is a Gracious Lord.

فِي أَيِّ صُورَةٍ مَا شَاءَ رَكَّبَكَ ﴿٨﴾

(82:8) ***and composed you in any form*** **(ṣūrah)** ***that*** **(mā)** ***He willed?***

Ṣūrah (form, shape) is the pattern that distinguishes one object from another.[1] The meaning is: "He composed you in any manner that He willed—His will being governed by His wisdom—in terms of being male or female, tall or short, attractive or unattractive, strong or weak, and so on. The same can be said about the common members among the humans which distinguish the individuals from one another, such as hands, legs, eyes, head, torso, stature and so on." All of these demonstrate the equilibrium between the organs. God says: *We have certainly created the human being in the fairest stature* (95:4). All these elements trace to the working of the Gracious Lord, and the human being has no role in them.

كَلَّا بَلْ تُكَذِّبُونَ بِالدِّينِ ﴿٩﴾

(82:9) ***Nay*** **(kallā)*****! Rather, you deny the retribution*** **(dīn).**

The exclamation *kallā* (nay, never, no way) rejects the human audacity against God's grace. It means that one has no justification to lead such a path toward disbelief and disobedience. In other words: "Do not be deceived by your Lord's grace, for that will not be accepted from you."

What is meant by *dīn* here is *jazāʾ* (payment, retribution, compensation). The word *Rather* offers an alternative explanation for *What dared you against your Gracious Lord?* (82:6). What pits them against their Gracious Lord is their denial of retribution, which they know to be true according to their pristine intuition (*fiṭrah*), though it may be at a potential level [and not actualized].

The previous verses reprimanded the human being for their audacity against their Gracious Lord, and scolded them for their insolent ungratefulness and disobedience, without fearing retribution. This verse makes a transition—marked by the word *bal* (rather, nay)—to address the same

1 There is no conjunction "and" at the beginning of this verse because the verse interprets *and balanced you* (82:7). The particle *mā* is *zāʾidah* (extra, supplementary, semantically empty), added for emphasis. (Auth.)

audience, including anyone who shares the qualities of disbelief and disobedience. The verse says: "Rather, the fact of the matter is that you and anyone like you deny the Day of Judgment and retribution. You reject it insistently."

وَإِنَّ عَلَيْكُمْ لَحَافِظِينَ ﴿١٠﴾

(82:10) ***Indeed, there are over you guardians,***

There are two ways through which one's actions will be presented to them on the Day of Resurrection: (1) They are present in the soul of the doer, which they will be invoked to remember. (2) They are preserved by the recording of guardian angels who are appointed as scribes over each person. This verse points out the second way. One's reckoning of deeds will be based on that record, as God says: *We have attached every person's omen to his neck, and We shall bring it out for him on the Day of Resurrection as a wide open book that he will encounter. "Read your book! Today your soul suffices as your own reckoner"* (17:13-14). Given the context, the meaning is: "There are indeed guardians over you who preserve your deeds through writing."

كِرَامًا كَاتِبِينَ ﴿١١﴾

(82:11) ***noble writers,***

The above mentioned guardians are possessed of honor and nobility before God. Angels are recurrently characterized with *karāmah* (nobility, honor, grace, magnanimity) in the Qur'an. Apparently this refers to their inherent immunity from sin and disobedience. They are hard-wired with infallibility. This can be deduced contextually from these verses: *Rather, they are [His] honored servants. They do not venture to speak ahead of Him, and they act by His command* (21:26-27). These verses show that the angels have no will except what God wills, and act only according to His commands. Likewise the Qur'an describes them as: *noble and pious* (80:16).

"Writing" in this verse pertains to recording the deeds, as we can infer from the next verse: *who know whatever you do* (82:12). Interested readers should refer to a discussion that we had on the meaning of recording the deeds, under the verse: *Indeed We used to record what you used to do* (45:29).

يَعْلَمُونَ مَا تَفْعَلُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

(82:12) ***who know whatever you do.***

This verse implies that the above mentioned guardians do not err in distinguishing good from evil, and virtue from vice. This complements the last verse, which exonerated them from sin and disobedience. The scribes have a comprehensive discernment of one's deeds including its true quality, and preserve them as they are. This implies that the scribes are aware of the intentions of the people. Otherwise, they would not be able to discern whether an act is good or bad, a virtue or a vice. Their knowledge about the deeds will not be complete without knowing the intentions.

The current verses do not specify the number of these angels who are charged with recording the deeds. Elsewhere God says: *When the twin recorders record [his deeds], seated on the right hand and on the left* (50:17). This suggests that there are two of them for each person, seated on the right and left. According to the narrations from the Infallibles, the one on the right records the good deeds, and the one on the left records the sins. Furthermore, there are *mustafīḍah* (multiple, diffused, numerous) narrations, through both Sunni and Shia chains of transmission, saying that the scribes of the day ascend to heavens at sunset, when they are replaced by another group for the night shift. They record the deeds until the dawn, when they switch again with the scribes of the day. These narrations are reported under the verse: *Indeed the dawn recital is attended [by angels]* (17:78).[1]

إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ لَفِي نَعِيمٍ ﴿١٣﴾ وَإِنَّ الْفُجَّارَ لَفِي جَحِيمٍ ﴿١٤﴾

(82:13-14) ***Indeed the virtuous*** **(al-abrār)** ***shall be amid bliss, and indeed the vicious*** **(al-fujjār)** ***shall be in hell***

These verses present a conclusion to the recording of the deeds by the scribes, and their appearance on the Day of Resurrection. That is why there is no conjunction "and" at the beginning of the first verse.[2]

Al-abrār (the virtuous, the righteous, the pious) are those who performed good deeds. *Al-fujjār* (the vicious, the wrongdoers, the sinners)

1 See volume 25, pp. 243-244 of the English translation. (Ed.)

2 The lack of "and" marks a new stage. (Ed.)

are those who rent the veil of piety with their sins. Apparently what is meant here is sinners among the disbelievers specifically, because the sinful believers would not abide in hell eternally.[1] It is said that the words of *naʿīm* (bliss) and *jaḥīm* (hell) are mentioned in the indefinite form (*nakirah*) in order to indicate aggrandizement.[2]

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يَصْلَوْنَهَا يَوْمَ الدِّينِ ﴿١٥﴾

(82:15) ***entering it on the Day of Retribution,***

The antecedent of the pronoun "it" is *hell* (82:14). It means: "The vicious will be bound to hell on the Day of Judgment, and will not be separated from it."

وَمَا هُمْ عَنْهَا بِغَائِبِينَ ﴿١٦﴾

(82:16) ***and they shall not be absent from it.***

This verse is added as an interpretation for *entering it…* (82:15). It underscores the idea that they shall be bound to hell and abide therein forever. "Being absent" from it means exiting it. Hence, the verse is comparable to: *and they shall not leave the fire* (2:167).

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وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا يَوْمُ الدِّينِ ﴿١٧﴾

(82:17) ***And what will show you what is the Day of Retribution?***

This verse glorifies and emphasizes the magnificence of the Day of Retribution. The meaning is: "Your knowledge cannot encompass the reality of the Day of Resurrection." This is a figurative way of conveying the importance and greatness of something; it defies all expression and description. Naturally the verse should have referred to the Day of Retribution with a pronoun [since it was already mentioned in the last verse]. However, it repeats the noun to further underline its gravity.

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ثُمَّ مَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا يَوْمُ الدِّينِ ﴿١٨﴾

1 Verse 82:16 below implies eternal damnation, which is only applicable to those who embrace denial with their soul, not sinful believers who nevertheless maintain their pristine nature. (Ed.)

2 That is: "The virtuous will be in such a bliss, and the vicious will be in such a fire." (Ed.)

(82:18) ***Again, what will show you what is the Day of Retribution?***

This is an emphatic repetition of the preceding verse.

يَوْمَ لَا تَمْلِكُ نَفْسٌ لِنَفْسٍ شَيْـًٔا ۖ وَالْأَمْرُ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلَّهِ ﴿١٩﴾

(82:19) *A day* **(yawma)** ***when no soul will be of any avail to another soul and all command that day will belong to Allah.***

This verse provides a brief description of the reality of the Day of Retribution after provoking the audience to know more about it: *And what will show you what is the Day of Retribution* (82:17).[1] The apparent links and relations between causes and effects will be cut off and lost on that day. This can be deduced from verses like: *all their means of recourse will be cut off* (2:166); *the wrongdoers will see, when they sight the punishment, that power, altogether, belongs to Allah* (2:165). Accordingly, no one will control anything for anyone. No soul can deflect any harm or attract any benefit to any soul. This does not contradict the verses about intercession, because intercession will take place with God's leave, so it is part of what belongs to God.

… and all command* (al-amr) *that day will belong to Allah: God will be the sole possessor of *al-amr* (all command, the matter, all affairs). No one else will be in charge of anything. It is said that *amr* (command) in this verse is the singular of *awāmir*, which pertains to an authoritative sovereign. This makes the verse comparable to: *"To whom does the sovereignty belong today?" "To Allah, the One, the All-Paramount!"* (40:16). Accordingly, *amr* (command) in this verse is the antonym of *nahy* (prohibition). The theme and context of the verses do not quite support the interpretation of *amr* as *shaʾn* (matter, affair, state).[2]

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning *when the graves are overturned* (82:4) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: They will split and the people will come out of them.

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1 The word *yawma* is *manṣūb* in terms of inflection (in the accusative form), which implies an omitted verb such as *udhkur* (make mention of, remember, remind them of). (Auth.)

2 This verse is the closest Qur'anic match for verse 1:4. In the light of this verse, one can deduce that it is more appropriate to recite verse 1:4 with *mālik* (owner), not *malik* (king). (Ed.)

(2) Ḥudhayfah narrated from the Prophet: "Whoever establishes a good custom that is practiced will have its reward and the like of the rewards of those who follows it, without diminishing anything from their rewards. And whoever establishes an evil custom that is practiced will have its burden and the like of the burdens of those who follow it, without diminishing anything from their burdens." Then Ḥudhayfah recited: *then a soul shall know what it has sent before and sent after* (82:5).[1]

(3) The Prophet recited the verse: *O man! What dared you against your Gracious Lord* (82:6). Then he said: His *jahl* (ignorance, imprudence)[2] [dared him].[3]

(4) Concerning *and composed you in any form that He willed* (82:8) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: Had He wanted, He would have composed you in a different form.[4]

(5) Concerning *Indeed, there are over you guardians* (82:10) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: The two angels that are appointed over each person.

(6) There is a narration which says: These two [the guardian angels] come to a believer at the time of the Morning Prayer. Once they descend, the guardian angels of the night ascend. When the sun sets, the guardian angels appointed for the night descend, and the guardian angels of the day ascend with the person's record of deeds toward the Almighty God. This process goes on until the time of the person's death.

When death comes to the person, if the person had been righteous, the two angels will say, "May God reward you on our behalf for being our companion. There were many righteous deeds which

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Ḥākim (who has authenticated it).

2 In the Qur'an and hadith, *jahl* is not the opposite of knowledge (ᶜ*ilm*), but the opposite of reason (ᶜ*aql*). It means being impulsive and short-sighted, which results in giving a greater weight to instant gratifications over long-term benefits. According to the Qur'an, sins are committed out of *jahl* (4:17, 6:54, 16:119). (Ed.)

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ᶜAbd b. Ḥumayd, on the authority of Ṣāliḥ b. Mismār.

4 This is also narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq in *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*, via an incomplete chain of narration (*mursal*).

you made us see, many good words that you made us hear, and many good gatherings that you made us attend. Today we are as you please, and shall be intercessors [for you] before your Lord." If the person had been a sinner, the two angels will say, "May God penalize you on our behalf for being our companion, because indeed you troubled us. There were many evil deeds which you made us see, many evil words that you made us hear, and many evil gatherings that you made us attend. Today we are as you displease, and shall be witnesses [against you] before your Lord."[1]

(7) Concerning *and all command that day will belong to Allah* (82:19) Imam al-Bāqir told Jābir: All command belongs to God, not only on that day, but also today. Jābir, [the difference is that] upon the Day of Resurrection, all rulers will perish. Hence, no ruler will remain except God.[2]

Author's comment: According to this narration, the idea that all command belongs to God is not limited to the Day of Resurrection, but it is always the case. If the Day of Resurrection is mentioned specifically, it is because this reality will become *manifest* on that day, not that it *occurs* only at that point. The special of that day is the evident display of this play, as the power and sway of anyone other than God will decay. The same principle applies to the other specific descriptions of the Day of Resurrection. Hence, this is one of the key narrations [that provide us a general mental framework].

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1 *Saʿd al-suʿūd*.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of ʿUmar b. Shimr, on the authority of Jābir.

Chapter 83

al-Muṭaffifin (The Defrauders)

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Verses 1-21

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful.

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 36 verses. It begins with a warning against the defrauders in weight and measures. It admonishes them that they shall be raised for retribution on a tremendous day, which is the Day of Resurrection. The chapter then presents an account of what the vicious and the virtuous will go through on that day. The theme of the opening verses—regarding the defrauders—is more compatible with Medinan chapters, but the rest of the verses can be either Meccan or Medinan.

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وَيْلٌ لِلْمُطَفِّفِينَ ﴿١﴾

(83:1) ***Shame on the defrauders who use short measures*** **(lil-muṭaffifin, from taṭfif),**

This verse implies a curse. *Taṭfif* means "giving someone short measure" in terms of count or weight. God has prohibited this, and called it *ifsād* (corruption, causing mischief) on earth, as narrated from Prophet Shuʿayb: *O my people! Give full measure and full weight in justice, and wrong not people in respect of their goods. And do not act wickedly on the earth, causing corruption* (11:85). Under that verse we explained in what sense such practice amounts to causing corruption on the earth.

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الَّذِينَ إِذَا اكْتَالُوا عَلَى النَّاسِ يَسْتَوْفُونَ ﴿٢﴾ وَإِذَا كَالُوهُمْ أَوْ وَزَنُوهُمْ يُخْسِرُونَ ﴿٣﴾

(83:2-3) ***who, when they measure*** **(iktālū, from iktiyāl)** ***[a***

commodity bought] against **(ʿalá)** ***the people, take the full measure*** **(yastawfūna, from istīfāʾ),** ***but diminish*** **(yukhsirūna, from ikhsār)** ***when they measure*** **(kālūhum, from kayl)** ***or weigh for them.***

Iktiyāl means "getting something from someone using a measure," and *kayl* means "giving something to someone using a measure." The preposition *ʿalá* (against, over, on) is used in the first verse to imply afflicting a loss on the other side. *Istīfāʾ* means "receiving one's right fully." *Ikhsār* means "inflicting a loss upon someone."[1]

The meaning is: "When they are supposed to receive something from others with measure, they receive what belongs to them in full. But when they are supposed to give something to others with measure or weight, they pay them less than their right. Thus they cause them a loss."

The verses together make up a single criticism: They respect their own right, but do not respect the rights of others. In other words, they do not consider others to be entitled to the same rights as they consider themselves to be. This bias results in the corruption of the society, which is founded on justice and the reciprocity of rights and responsibilities. If this balance is not maintained, everything falls into ruin.

Why does the first verse [83:2] only mentions measure without weight,[2] while the second one [83:3] mentions both: *when they measure or weigh for them* (83:3)? Here are some suggested answers:

(1) The subjects involved were merchants who predominantly purchased large quantities of grains, vegetables and other commodities wholesale. Then they would resell them gradually in small quantities. Most of these commodities were commonly traded with measure, not with weight. That is why the first only mentions measure by generalization (*taghlīb*).

(2) Even though weight is not mentioned in the verse, it is implied by the mention of measure.

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1 According to *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, the verbs *kāla* (to measure) and *wazana* (to weigh) can be used either without or with the letter *lām* (for). The former is the usage of the people of Hejaz, while the latter belongs to others. The verse has been revealed based on the former. (Auth.)

2 "Measure" (*kayl*) means units of volume or capacity, such as bushels of grain. "Weight" (*wazn*) means units of weight, as used for honey. Two other units of measurement are "count" (*ʿadad*) which is used for livestock, and "area" (*masāḥah*) which is used for land. (Ed.)

Comment: The second verse [83:3] defies this explanation, because the verse mentions both. Hence, this view is an unwarranted imposition on the verse.

(3) The verses were revealed according to the common practice of the audience at the time. They used to buy things only with measure, but sell with both measure and weight.

Comment: There is no evidence to substantiate this claim. There are further suggested explanations for the difference of expression in the two verses, but none of them is quite plausible.

أَلَا يَظُنُّ أُولَٰئِكَ أَنَّهُمْ مَبْعُوثُونَ ۝٤ لِيَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ ۝٥

(83:4-5) ***Do they not speculate*** **(yaẓunnu, from ẓann)** ***that they*** **(ūlāʾika)** ***will be resurrected on a tremendous day,***

This is a rhetorical question which implies a negation and surprise. *Ẓann* is meant in its common sense (speculating, supposing, thinking). The verse refers to the subjects using the demonstrative pronoun *ūlāʾika* (they, those) [which is used for people at a distance] in order to indicate their distance from God's mercy. The *tremendous day* is the Day of Resurrection, when they will be paid back for their deeds.

Even though it is incumbent to believe in the hereafter with certainty, even the speculation and possibility of afterlife would be sufficient for the purpose of these verses. This is because in practice, the mere expectation of loss and damage suffices to safeguard oneself and prevent its occurrence, even though one may not know whether it will occur or not for sure. Therefore, speculating that there might be a tremendous day when God will hold the people accountable for their deeds would require one to refrain from such an egregious sin—a sin that would result in an excruciating punishment. Some exegetes have said that *ẓann* in this verse means knowledge.[1]

يَوْمَ يَقُومُ النَّاسُ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ۝٦

(83:6) ***a day when humankind will stand before the Lord of all nations?***

1 Concerning the Qur'anic usage of uncertainty about the hereafter, see the footnote under volume 39, p. 44 of the English translation, under verse 71:13. (Ed.)

What is meant is standing up from their graves, which is a figurative expression for being raised to life after being dead. They will stand and await God's judgment among them.

كَلَّا إِنَّ كِتَابَ الْفُجَّارِ لَفِي سِجِّينٍ ﴿٧﴾

(83:7) *Nay* (kallā)*! The record* (kitāb) *of the vicious is indeed in Sijjīn.*

It is said that the exclamation *kallā* (nay, never, no way) pushes aside their common usage of short measures and their heedlessness of the resurrection and reckoning.

Through contemplating the four verses here about *Sijjīn* [83:7-10], and the four verses below about *ʿIlliyyūn—Nay! The record of the virtuous is indeed in ʿIlliyyūn…* (18-21)—we can deduce the following: *Sijjīn* is the antonym of *ʿIlliyyūn*, which means "the highest of the high." Accordingly, *Sijjīn* implies elements of abasement and imprisonment, much like what is mentioned in the verse: *Then we relegated them to the lowest of the low* (95:5). Therefore, it is best to interpret it as a hyperbolic form of the word *sijn* (prison), analogous to *sikkīr* (very intoxicated) and *shirrīb* (massive drinker), which are intensified forms of *sukr* (intoxication) and *shurb* (drinking). As such, *Sijjīn* means a place that confines whoever enters it forever. This is how some exegetes have interpreted the term.[1]

What is meant by *kitāb* here is *maktūb* (that which is written). It is derived from *kitābah* (inscription, writing)[2] which means "definite decree." *The record of the vicious* is the retribution that God has recorded and ordained for them by His decree. The effective meaning is: "The retribution that God has determined for them and warned them with is in *Sijjīn*, which is a prison that confines whoever enters it for a long time—or forever."

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا سِجِّينٌ ﴿٨﴾

(83:8) *And what will show you what is Sijjīn?*

This is an expression of intense terror.

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1 *ʿIlliyyūn* can be translated as "the Highest Heaven" or "the Elevated Record," and *Sijjīn* as "the Lowest Hell" or "the Infernal Record." (Ed.)

2 *Kitābah* is a *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund) which means "the act of writing." (Ed.)

كِتَابٌ مَرْقُومٌ ﴿٩﴾

(83:9) *A written* (marqūm, from raqm) *record* (kitāb).

This verse interprets and describes *Sijjīn*.[1] Again [as in verse 83:7], *kitāb* here means *maktūb* (that which is written), derived from *kitābah* (inscription, writing), which means "decreeing, recording." Al-Rāghib says:

> *Raqm* means "large handwriting." It is also defined as "marking a writing with dots." Both meanings can be applied to the verses: *A written record* (83:9, 83:20).

The second meaning [of *raqm*] is more appropriate in this context, because it would imply that what is prescribed for them has been clarified from all ambiguity. In other words, it is a definite decree that cannot be revoked. The effective meaning is: "*Sijjīn* is decreed and recorded for them [as their eternal abode] in a clear way that leaves no ambiguity."

This means the record of the vicious is in *Sijjīn*, which itself is a record. There is no problem with this view because the latter is a broader receptacle which contains the former. *Sijjīn* is a comprehensive record that includes the fates of anyone who deserves punishment, including the vicious as well as others.[2]

وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿١٠﴾

(83:10) *Shame on the deniers on that day,*

This verse curses the vicious, and equates them with the deniers. Effectively speaking, *on that day* identifies the time for the occurrence of

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1 This verse is a predicate for an omitted subject, which is a pronoun that refers to *Sijjīn*. (Auth.)

2 The author's interpretation assumes that verse 83:9 builds on verse 83:8 by interpreting *Sijjīn*. However, the repetition of the word *kitāb* suggests that verse 83:9 refers back to verse 83:7, where the same word is mentioned. This makes the meaning more fluent: "It is inscribed that the vicious are destined to *Sijjīn*, and this is an unequivocal decree." Similarly, verses 83:18-21 say: "It is inscribed that the virtuous shall abide in *ʿIlliyyūn*. This is a final verdict, and those who are near most to God are witness to it." This is the last of the suggested views by the exegetes under the next verse. In the Qur'an's parlance, *wa mā adrāka…* (And what will show you what is…) is a complete expression that underlines the importance of a reality, without necessitating a follow-up. (Ed.)

the verse: *The record of the vicious is indeed in Sijjīn* (83:7). The meaning is: "May the vicious—who are the deniers—perish. On that day the retribution that God has written and ordained for them shall come to pass, and the punishment shall befall them."

The above is what we can say after contemplating the four verses [83:7-10] as parts of a consistent thread of meaning. Exegetes have a wide range of views concerning the words and phrases in these verses. Here are some of their interpretations:

(1) *The record* (kitāb) *of the vicious* (83:7): The word *kitāb* here means *maktūb* (that which is written), and implies the records of their deeds.

(2) The word *kitāb* means *kitābah* (inscription, writing), and implies an omission in the verse. The implied meaning is: "The inscription of *the deeds of* the vicious is indeed in *Sijjīn*."

(3) *Al-fujjār* (the vicious, the wrongdoers, the sinners) are a broader group than *the deniers* (83:10), including both the disbelievers and the sinners [among believers].

(4) *Sijjīn* is the lowest of the seven layers of earth [or land], wherein the records of the vicious shall be placed.

(5) *Sijjīn* is a valley in hell.

(6) *Sijjīn* is a well in hell.

(7) *Sijjīn* is a name for their records of deeds.

(8) The first *Sijjīn* [in verse 83:7] is the name of the place where the records of their deeds will be placed. The second *Sijjīn* [in verse 83:8] is a name for their records of deeds.

(9) *Sijjīn* is a name for an encyclopedic book for all evil, where the misdeeds of all the jinns and humans are recorded.

(10) What is meant by *Sijjīn* is total loss, failure and humiliation. It is much like saying, "So-and-so reached their nadir" when they drop all the way to the bottom [in terms of happiness and success].

(11) *Sijjīn* is an altered form of *sijjīl* (baked clay, shale) [as used in verses 11:82, 15:74, 105:4]. This is like saying Jibrīn instead of Jibrīl (Gabriel).

(12) The current verse—*Woe to the deniers on that day* (83:10)—picks up the discussion from the verse: *a day when humankind will stand before the Lord of all nations?* (83:6). The three verses in between [83:7-9] are parenthetical.

(13) *A written record* (83:9): This verse does not interpret *Sijjīn* [in

verse 83:8], but it interprets *The record* in the verse: *The record of the vicious* (83:7).

Comment: If the readers reflect on the above views, they would concur that many of them involve unfounded impositions on the verses, without any evidence for them whatsoever. Further, they interrupt the continuous thread that runs through the verses, which can be matched with the four verses below concerning the virtuous [83:18-21]. That is why we will not bother analyzing these suggestions individually

الَّذِينَ يُكَذِّبُونَ بِيَوْمِ الدِّينِ ﴿١١﴾

(83:11) ***who deny the Day of Retribution;***

The verse interprets *the deniers* in the last verse. Given the following verses, apparently what is meant here is outspoken deniers who are not shy about their denial. This means that the rebuke in the verses pertains to disbelievers in particular, and does not include sinners among the believers. Hence, the subject of discussion is not all defrauders, but only the infidels among them.

An alternative view is that perhaps denial is meant in a general sense, including denial through one's acts and practice. This may be confirmed by what we read above: *Do they not speculate that they will be resurrected?* (83:4). If so, the verse would be applicable to all wrongdoers among both believers and unbelievers.

وَمَا يُكَذِّبُ بِهِ إِلَّا كُلُّ مُعْتَدٍ أَثِيمٍ ﴿١٢﴾

(83:12) ***and none denies it except every sinful*** **(athīm)** ***transgressor*** **(muʿtadī, muʿtad)**

What is meant here is transgressing beyond the boundaries of servitude.[1] *Athīm* means "very sinful," such that one's sins accumulate on top of one another as the person plunges headlong into one's desires. Clearly, the sole impediment to sinning is belief in afterlife and retribution. But when one grows accustomed to sin, when one's heart gets attached to stepping beyond the limits, and when one is immersed in the pursuit of

1 *Muʿtadī* (transgressor) is an *ism al-fāʿil* (nominative substantive, active participial noun) derived from the verb *iʿtidāʾ*, which means "transgression, violation, trespass." (Auth.)

desires, then they will be reluctant to submit to any harness that restrains them from disobedience. This will eventually lead to outright denial of the resurrection and reckoning. God says: *Then the fate of those who committed misdeeds was that they denied the signs of Allah and they used to deride them* (30:10).

إِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِ آيَاتُنَا قَالَ أَسَاطِيرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿١٣﴾

(83:13) ***When Our signs* (āyātunā)** ***are recited to him, he says, "Fables* (asāṭīr)** ***of the ancients!"***

Given the word *recited*, we can infer that "Our signs" (*āyātunā*) mean the verses (*āyāt*) of the Qur'an. *Asāṭīr* means "that which is written in lines (sing. *saṭr*)." What is meant here is the superstitious legends and tales of ancient nations. The meaning is: "When the verses of Qur'an are recited to them, admonishing them against disobedience and warning them about the resurrection and retribution, they retort: 'These are mumbo-jumbo.'"

كَلَّا ۖ بَلْ ۜ رَانَ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

(83:14) ***Nay! Rather, their hearts have been sullied* (rāna, from rayn)** ***by what they have been earning.***

The exclamation *kallā* (nay, never, no way) rejects the above mentioned claim of the deniers: *"Fables of the ancients"* (83:13). *What they have been earning* is their sins. Al-Rāghib says:

> *Rayn* is the rust or stain that forms on the surface of a shiny object. God says: *Rather, their hearts have been sullied*, which means that their deeds have covered the polish of their hearts like rust. Thus they cannot distinguish between good and evil.

Saying that their hearts are rusted by their sins means that their sins are veiling them from grasping the truth as it is. We can deduce a few points from this verse:

(1) Evil deeds have certain forms and patterns that mark their impression on the soul.
(2) These impressions hinder and veil the soul from perceiving the truth as is.
(3) In its pristine state, the human soul is pure, transparent and polished, such that it can perceive the truth as it is, can mark it from falsehood, and can distinguish virtue from vice. God says: *By the*

soul and by What fashioned it, then inspired it with [discernment between] its virtues and its vices (91:7-8).

كَلَّا إِنَّهُمْ عَنْ رَبِّهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَمَحْجُوبُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

(83:15) ***Nay! They will be alienated from their Lord on that day.***

The exclamation *kallā* (nay, never, no way) refutes their sins which block their hearts from comprehending the truth. They are *alienated from their Lord* on the Day of Resurrection in the sense that they will be deprived of having an honorable position of proximity to the divine. Perhaps this is what is meant by some exegetes, saying that it means being veiled from the *mercy* of their Lord.

Meanwhile, all veils will be lifted for everyone in another sense: All intermediate causes between God and His creatures will fall on that day, such that everyone will have complete knowledge of their Lord. The Qur'an says: *"To whom does the sovereignty belong today?" "To Allah, the One, the All-Paramount!"* (40:16); *and they shall know that Allah is the Manifest Reality* (24:25).

ثُمَّ إِنَّهُمْ لَصَالُو الْجَحِيمِ ﴿١٦﴾

(83:16) ***Then*** **(thumma)** ***they will indeed enter hell,***

In this verse and the next one, the word *thumma* (then) marks the different parts of speech [not a temporal gap].[1] Exegetes have offered two meanings for this verse: (1) "They will enter hell and abide there." (2) "They will enter hell and suffer its heat."

ثُمَّ يُقَالُ هَذَا الَّذِي كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

(83:17) ***then told, "This is what you used to deny!"***

This is a statement of blame and rebuke. The speaker is either the keepers of hell, or the inhabitants of paradise.

كَلَّا إِنَّ كِتَابَ الْأَبْرَارِ لَفِي عِلِّيِّينَ ﴿١٨﴾ وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا عِلِّيُّونَ ﴿١٩﴾ كِتَابٌ مَرْقُومٌ ﴿٢٠﴾

1 *Thumma* in such cases can be interpreted as "in addition, besides." (Ed.)

(83:18-20) ***Nay! The record of the virtuous is indeed in ʿIlliyyūn. And what will show you what is ʿIlliyyūn? A written record,***

The word *Nay* in this verse is comparable to the same word in the verse: *Nay! The record of the vicious…* (83:7). As we already explained, *ʿIlliyyūn*, means "elevation above elevation," which can be matched with lofty positions and stations of proximity to the Almighty God. This is in direct contrast with *Sijjīn*. These three verses [83:18-20] should be interpreted in the same way that we interpreted their counterparts above: *Nay! The record of the vicious is indeed in Sijjīn. And what will show you what is Sijjīn? A written record* (83:7-9). The meaning is: "What has been written and decreed for the virtuous as the rewards of their good deeds lies in *ʿIlliyyūn*. But what do you know about *ʿIlliyyūn*? It is a written and ordained reality which is definite and inevitable, without any ambiguity around it."

Exegetes have offered a wide range of views under these verses, much like what we narrated under the verses above [83:7-10]. Here are some of their suggestions concerning *ʿIlliyyūn* in particular:

(1) It is the seventh heaven, right under the Throne, where the souls of the believers will abide.
(2) It is *the Lote Tree of the Ultimate Boundary* (53:14), which is the final destination of the deeds [as they rise to heaven].
(3) It is a tablet of *zabarjad* (chrysolite, emerald, aquamarine) that hangs beneath the Throne, with the acts of the virtuous inscribed on it.
(4) It means high ranks that are enveloped by [divine] majesty.

Comment: The problem with these views is the same problem that we stated above [under verse 83:10].

يَشْهَدُهُ الْمُقَرَّبُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

(83:21) ***witnessed by those brought near [to Allah]*** **(al-muqarrabūn).**

Given the preceding verses, what is meant by "witnessing" here is observing [not testifying]. *Al-muqarrabūn* (those brought nigh, the near most ones) are a subset of the inhabitants of paradise who are superior to the majority of the good-doers. This can be deduced from a verse below: *a spring where those brought near [to Allah] drink* (83:28). They shall witness it [the record of the virtuous, and/or the *ʿIlliyyūn*] as God will show it to them. A similar description is mentioned in the Qur'an with respect

to hell: *Nay! Were you to know with the knowledge of certitude, you would surely see hell* (102:5-6). This clarifies that *al-muqarrabūn* are the people of certitude (*ahl al-yaqīn*).

Here are two other suggested views:

(1) "Witnessing" here means presence, and *al-muqarrabūn* are the angels. The verse is about the angels being present with the records of deeds of the virtuous as they take the records up to God.

(2) *Al-muqarrabūn* includes both the virtuous (*al-abrār*) and the angels.

Comment: Both views hinge on interpreting the word *kitāb* (record, writing) [in verse 83:20] as the record of deeds. However, we already explained the implausibility of this interpretation [under verse 83:10].

Examining Narrations

(1) Imam al-Bāqir said: Sūrah al-Muṭaffifīn was revealed to the Prophet when he migrated to Medina. At the time, they [the Medinans] were the most unscrupulous of people in terms of measurement [in transactions], but then they started to measure properly.[1]

(2) Imam al-Bāqir said: "Indeed the Almighty God created us [Ahl al-Bayt] from the top of *ʿIlliyyūn* (the Highest Heaven, the Elevated Record). He created the hearts of our followers (lit. *shīʿah*) from what He created us from, and created their bodies from [a substance] lower than that. Thus their hearts incline toward us because they are created from what we are created from." Then he recited: *Nay! The record of the virtuous is indeed in ʿIlliyyūn. And what will show you what is ʿIlliyyūn? A written record, witnessed by those brought near [to Allah]* (83:18-21).

The Imam continued: "God created the hearts of our enemies from *Sijjīn* (the Lowest Hell, the Infernal Record). He created the hearts of their followers from what He created them from, and created their bodies from [a substance] lower than that. Thus their hearts incline toward them because they [the followers' hearts] are created from what they [the leaders] are created from." Then He recited: *Nay! The record of the vicious is indeed in Sijjīn. And what will show you what is Sijjīn? A written record. Shame on the*

1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

deniers on that day (83:7-10).[1]

Author's comment: As the reader can see, these narrations confirm our interpretation of the verses.

(3) Concerning *Nay! The record of the vicious is indeed in Sijjīn* (83:7) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: The punishment that God has inscribed for them is in *Sijjīn*.

(4) Imam al-Bāqir said: *Sijjīn* is the seventh earth [below all], and *ʿIlliyyūn* is the seventh heaven [above all].[2]

Author's comment: Assuming that this account is authentic, it is based on ascribing directions—such as up and down—to heaven and hell in some sense. The same idea is reflected in other narrations which describe the grave as "either a garden from the gardens of Paradise, or a pit from the pits of hell," and narrations which identify the desert of Barahūt [in Yemen] as a place for hell.

(5) Once Salmān and ʿAbd-Allah b. Salām met each other, where one of them said, "If you die before me, come to see me [in a dream] and tell me how your Lord dealt with you. And if I die before you, I will come to see you and inform you."
"How is that possible?" the other inquired.
"It is possible, since the souls of believers will be on a *barzakh* (middle ground, intermediate position) on the earth, where they can roam around as they wish, while the souls of disbelievers will be confined in *Sijjīn*. And God knows best."[3]

(6) Imam al-Bāqir said: There is a bright spot in the heart of every servant [of God]. If they sin, a dark stain appears on that bright spot. If they repent, the dark spot goes away. If they continue sinning, the dark stain will grow until it covers the brightness. Once it covers the brightness, the person would never return to goodness. That is what God says: *Nay! Rather, their hearts have*

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī. Another similar hadith is narrated from the Imam in *al-Kāfī*, on the authority of al-Thumālī, through other chains of narration. And another similar hadith is narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq in *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*, on the authority of Zayd al-Shaḥḥām, via an unconnected chain of transmission (*marfūʿ*).

2 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn al-Mubārak, on the authority of Saʿīd b. Musayyib.

been sullied by what they have been earning (83:14).[1]

(7) The Messenger of God said: Converse with each other, meet one another, and narrate hadith[2] amongst yourselves, because indeed hadith is a polish for the heart. Indeed the hearts rust as swords rust, and their polish is hadith…[3]

(8) Imam al-Bāqir said: Nothing is as detrimental to the heart as sin. Indeed the heart incurs sin, and continues with it until sin dominates it. Then its bottom comes up, and its top goes down [that is, the heart is subverted].[4]

(9) The Messenger of God said: When a believer commits a sin, a dark spot appears on their heart. If they repent, refrain [from repeating it], and ask forgiveness [from God], they polish their heart of that. But if they add [to their sins], then that [spot] will grow. This is the *rayn* (rust, sully, stain) that God has mentioned in His Book: *Nay! Rather, their hearts have been sullied by what they have been earning* (83:14).[5]

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Zurārah. The same idea is also narrated from the Prophet in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of several collections of hadith, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah.

2 *Ḥadīth* literally means "speech," but apparently what is meant here is Prophetic narrations. Otherwise, most other speech not only do not polish the heart of its rust, but add further dust. (Ed.)

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿAbd-Allah b. Muḥammad al-Ḥajjāl, on the authority of some of our companions, via an unconnected chain of transmission (*marfūʿ*).

4 *Rawḍat al-wāʿiẓīn*.

5 *Rawḍat al-wāʿiẓīn*.

Verses 22-36

These verses elaborate on some of the lofty ranks and stations of the righteous in the eyes of God, and their lush lifestyles in paradise. Though the disbelievers mock, wink and smirk at them in this world, they will deride the disbelievers in the hereafter as they observe the punishment that befalls them.

إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ لَفِي نَعِيمٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

(83:22) ***Indeed the virtuous shall be amid bliss*** **(naʿīm),**

Naʿīm means abundant *niʿmah* (blessing, bounty, boon). Its indefinite form indicates exaltation and glorification. The meaning is: "Indeed the virtuous shall abide in such plentiful bounties that are beyond description."

عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ يَنْظُرُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

(83:23) ***observing, [as they recline] on couches*** **(al-arāʾik).**

Arāʾik is the plural of *arīkah*, which is "the bed in a bridal chamber." The verse does not specify the object of their observance. This supports the interpretation that they will be looking at the refreshing scenes of paradise and the eternal blessings therein. Some have said that they will be observing the retribution of the disbelievers. However, this is not plausible [given the next verses].

تَعْرِفُ فِي وُجُوهِهِمْ نَضْرَةَ النَّعِيمِ ﴿٢٤﴾

(83:24) ***You will perceive in their faces the resplendence*** **(naḍrah)** ***of bliss.***

Naḍrah means "radiance, freshness." The verse is addressed to the Prophet on the account that he will be entitled to observe and realize this. Hence, it has a general audience, saying: "Anyone who looks at their face will recognize the freshness and happiness of the bliss in which they are."

يُسْقَوْنَ مِنْ رَحِيقٍ مَخْتُومٍ ﴿٢٥﴾

(83:25) ***They are served with a sealed distilled wine*** **(raḥīq).**

Raḥīq means "pure wine" that is not adulterated with any substance. That is why it is used with the adjective *sealed*, because one would naturally seal a precious commodity to preserve it from any impurity or mixture that may contaminate it.

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خِتَامُهُ مِسْكٌ ۚ وَفِي ذَٰلِكَ فَلْيَتَنَافَسِ الْمُتَنَافِسُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

(83:26) ***Its seal*** **(khitām)** ***is musk, and for such let the viers vie.***

There are two suggested definitions for *khitām*: (1) "That which seals something." The meaning would be: "The above mentioned wine is sealed with musk—as opposed to clay and other things which are used in this world to seal wine." (2) "The end of something." The meaning would be: "One who drinks the above mentioned wine will taste the flavor and aroma of musk at the end of their drink."

… and for such **(fī dhālika)** ***let the viers vie*** **(fal-yatanāfas al-mutanāfisūn, from tanāfus)***: Tanāfus* means "rivalry over acquiring something." In this context, it means "competing, racing." God says: *Race towards forgiveness from your Lord* (57:21); *So vie one with another in good works* (5:48). Hence, the verse encourages the audience to the *sealed distilled wine* (83:25) which was described above.[1]

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1 Some have pointed out a linguistic problem in the second half of this verse: *Fī dhālika* (for such) belongs to the end of the sentence, where the natural order of expression is: "and let the viers vie for such." But this means that the letter *wāw* (and) is immediately followed by the letter *fā'* (so, therefore; not translated in the English). This is grammatically impermissible.
Some exegetes have responded: The verse implies a conditional clause which has been omitted, and the letter *fā'* indicates its complement. Further, *fī dhālika* is mentioned earlier [than its natural position] to indicate the omission. The implied meaning is: "Should anyone vie for anything, let them strive for such a prize."
Another possible response is: The verse encourages the audience to vie for two things. One is clearly stated by *fī dhālika* (for such), and the other is omitted, indicated by the letter *wāw* (and). This can be deduced from the context, which is about a description of heavenly bliss. In other words, there is already a precedence for advertising the heavenly bounties in general. Then *fī dhālika* adds a specific subset of those bounties—namely the *sealed distilled wine* (83:25)—to the general encouragement. This is like any other statement where a general command is followed by a specific application of it, such as:

وَمِزَاجُهُ مِنْ تَسْنِيمٍ ﴿٢٧﴾

(83:27) *And whose seasoning* (mizājuhu) *is from Tasnīm,*

Mizāj (mixture, additive) is "a means and instrument for blending." Based on the verses below, *Tasnīm* is the name of a fountain in paradise. Linguistically speaking, there are two main elements in its root meaning: (1) *rafᶜ* (elevation, height, rising); (2) *milʾ* (repletion, fullness, brimming). The verb *sannama* is used when one raises something, and also when one fills a vessel. The hump of a camel is called *sanām*.[1]

عَيْنًا يَشْرَبُ بِهَا الْمُقَرَّبُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

(83:28) *a spring* (ᶜaynan) *where those brought near [to Allah] drink* (yasharbu bihā, from shariba).

This verse is an interpretation for *Tasnīm* (83:28).[2] It is said that the verb *shariba* can be used either with or without the letter *bāʾ* (by, with, at), without any difference in meaning.[3] The word *ᶜaynan* is *manṣūb* in terms of inflection (in the accusative form) since there is an implied verb at the beginning of the verse, which can be either "I praise"[4] or "I specifically mean."[5]

This verse implies that *al-muqarrabūn* (those brought nigh, the

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"Honor all believers, especially the righteous among them" or "Do not be a faultfinder, particularly of the scholars." (Auth.)
Based on the second response, the meaning would be: "The viers shall vie for heavenly bliss, and especially for its sealed distilled wine." (Ed.)

1 Therefore, the appellation *Tasnīm* signifies "a lofty plentiful spring." (Ed.)

2 Linguistically speaking, *where those brought near [to Allah] drink* is an adjective for *a spring*. (Auth.)

3 The letter *bāʾ* sometimes indicates immediate adjacency and contact. Hence, it need not be viewed *zāʾidah* (extra, supplementary, semantically empty) in this verse. It implies that *Tasnīm* is at the highest level of paradise, where *al-muqarrabūn* are stationed. They have direct access to it, while *al-abrār* receive a mix of it further down the stream. This complies with what the author deduces from the verse in the next paragraph. (Ed.)

4 The meaning is: "I praise *Tasnīm*, which is a spring where…" (Ed.)

5 The meaning is: "By *Tasnīm* I specifically mean a spring where…" (Ed.)

nearmost ones) drink from *Tasnīm* purely and entirely, unlike *al-abrār* (the virtuous, the righteous, the pious) who get to have only a mix of *Tasnīm* in their *sealed distilled wine* (83:25): *And whose seasoning is from Tasnīm* (83:27). This shows two points: (1) *Tasnīm* is a higher drink compared to the *sealed distilled wine* (83:25), because the latter gets a boost of taste when it is seasoned by some additive from the former. (2) *Al-muqarrabūn* are higher in rank compared to *al-abrār* (83:22)—who are main subject of these verses.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ أَجْرَمُوا كَانُوا مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يَضْحَكُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

(83:29) ***Indeed the guilty used to laugh at the faithful,***

The context shows that *the faithful* are the same as *the virtuous* (83:22) who were the subject of the previous verses. They are called *the faithful* because they were laughed at on the account of their faith. Similarly, the faithless are called *the guilty* to indicate that they were guilty by deriding the believers.

وَإِذَا مَرُّوا بِهِمْ يَتَغَامَزُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

(83:30) ***and when they passed them by they would wink at each other,***

The conjunction "and" connects this verse to *used to laugh* (83:29). The meaning is: "When the guilty came across the believers, they would hint at one another with the eye, with disdain for the believers."

وَإِذَا انْقَلَبُوا إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِمُ انْقَلَبُوا فَكِهِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

(83:31) ***and when they returned to their families they would return rejoicing (fakihīn, from fakih),***

There are two possible interpretations for *fakih*: (1) It means "boastfully exulting." The verse's meaning would be: "After their mocking and winking, the guilty would retreat to their families, being very complacent about what they have done." (2) It is derived from *fukāhah*, which means "friendly conversation." The verse's meaning would be: "They would retire to their homes while chatting humorously with one another about what they have done."

وَإِذَا رَأَوْهُمْ قَالُوا إِنَّ هَٰؤُلَاءِ لَضَالُّونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

(83:32) ***and when they saw them they would say, "Indeed those are the astray!"***

The guilty would say this against the believers assuming the role of either a witness, or a judge. The second is more apparent.

وَمَا أُرْسِلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ حَافِظِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾

(83:33) ***Though they were not sent as guardians over them.***

This verse reprimands and condemns the mockers. It means: "The guilty were not assigned as guards over the believers so that they may pass judgements on them as they wish—or may testify against them as they desire."

فَالْيَوْمَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنَ الْكُفَّارِ يَضْحَكُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

(83:34) ***So today the faithful will laugh at the faithless,***

Today means the Day of Judgment. *The guilty* (83:29) are called *the faithless*, referring to their most fundamental quality. In the original Arabic, *at the faithless* is mentioned before *will laugh*, which is against the natural order of expression. It is said that this is meant to indicate a switch of roles. That is: "Unlike this world where the faithless used to laugh at the faithful, today it is the faithful who will laugh at the faithless."

عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ يَنْظُرُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

(83:35) ***on couches, they observe:***

On couches and *they observe* are two further predicates for *the faithful* (83:34).

هَلْ ثُوِّبَ الْكُفَّارُ مَا كَانُوا يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

(83:36) ***Have the faithless been requited*** **(thuwwiba, from thawāb)** ***for what they used to do?***

The original meaning of *thawāb* (reward) is *jazāʾ* (payment, compensation) in an absolute sense, although it is more commonly used for good

deeds. This verse is a complement for *they observe* (83:35), and serves as the object of their observation.

The meaning is: "The believers will be reclining on couches in bridal chambers, looking at the retribution of the faithless for the various sins that they committed, including: (1) laughing at the believers [83:29]; (2) looking askance at them when they passed by them [83:30]; (3) returning to their households exulting [83:31]; (4) saying, *"Indeed those are the astray!"* (83:32).

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning *and for such let the viers vie* (83:26) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: For the reward that We mentioned, which is what a believer seeks.

(2) Muqātil and al-Kalbī said: The verse *and when they passed them by they would wink at each other* (83:31) was revealed in reference to ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. In one occasion, he, in a group of Muslims, went to see the Prophet. The hypocrites derided them, and smirked and winked at them sardonically. When they retreated to their crew they said, "Today we saw the baldy" and had a good laugh at him. Thus the verse was revealed before ᶜAlī and his companions reached the Prophet.[1]

(3) Ibn ᶜAbbās said: *The guilty* (83:29) are the hypocrites from Quraysh, and *the faithful* (83:29) are ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and his companions.[2]

(4) Concerning the word *fakihīn* (83:31) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: [It means] *yaskharūna* (mocking, deriding, jeering).

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1 *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*. The same account is reported in *al-Kashshāf*.

2 *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*, on the authority of al-Ḥākim Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥaskānī's *Shawāhid al-tanzīl*, on the authority of Abū Ṣāliḥ.

Chapter 84

al-Inshiqāq (The Splitting Open)

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Verses 1-25

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful.

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 25 verses. It talks about the occurrence of the Hour. Humans are on a journey leading to their Lord, until they encounter their Lord and are recompensed according to the record of their deeds, which is emphasized in the chapter. The aspect of warning dominates the aspect of glad tiding in this sūrah. The theme of the verses indicate that the chapter was revealed in Mecca.

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إِذَا السَّمَاءُ انْشَقَّتْ ﴿١﴾

(84:1) ***When the sky is split open*** **(inshaqqat, from inshiqāq),**

This verse introduces a conditional clause which is left incomplete. Its complement can be inferred from the verse: *O man! You are laboring toward your Lord laboriously, and you will encounter Him* (84:6). The implied meaning is: "When these events occur, humans will encounter their Lord, who will reckon their deeds and pay them for what they have done."

The *inshiqāq* of the sky is its cracking and opening. That is among the events that mark the occurrence of the Hour. Other such events, mentioned elsewhere in the Qur'an, include the earth spreading out [84:3], the sun winding up [81:1], the stars falling [82:2], and the sun and the moon being brought together [75:9].

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وَأَذِنَتْ لِرَبِّهَا وَحُقَّتْ ﴿٢﴾

(84:2) ***and gives ear*** **(adhinat, from idhn)** ***to its Lord as it should*** **(ḥuqqat).**

Idhn means "listening, giving ear." The word *udhun* (ear) is from the same root. Here it is used figuratively to imply submission and obedience. *Ḥuqqat* means "it becomes capable and befitting to give ear."[1] The meaning is: "The sky will submit and be humbled before its Lord. And indeed that is befitting of it: the right thing for it is to listen to its Lord and obey Him."

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وَإِذَا الْأَرْضُ مُدَّتْ ﴿٣﴾

(84:3) ***When the earth is spread out,***

Apparently what is meant here is the stretching of the earth [or land], as per the verse: *The day the earth is transformed into another earth and the heavens [as well]* (14:48).

وَأَلْقَتْ مَا فِيهَا وَتَخَلَّتْ ﴿٤﴾

(84:4) ***and throws out what is in it, emptying itself,***

The meaning is: "The earth will cast out the dead inside it, and will not spare any of them in this regard." Two other suggested meanings are:

(1) "The earth will throw out the dead and the treasures in it." This is according to the verse: *and the earth discharges its burdens* (99:2).

(2) "The earth will cast out what is inside it, and will relieve itself from the mountains and seas on it."

Comment: Our interpretation is more apparent.

وَأَذِنَتْ لِرَبِّهَا وَحُقَّتْ ﴿٥﴾

(84: 5) ***and gives ear to its Lord as it should.***

This is identical to verse 84:2, which we already interpreted. The pronouns "its" and "it" refer to *the earth* (84:3), just as the same pronouns in verse 84:2 refer to *the sky* (84:1).

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدْحًا فَمُلَاقِيهِ ﴿٦﴾

(84:6) ***O man! You are laboring toward*** **(ilá)** ***your Lord laboriously (kadḥan), and you will encounter Him.***

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1 The use of past tense for a future event indicates certainty. It is as though the event has already occurred. (Ed.)

There are two suggested meanings for *kadḥ*: (1) According to al-Rāghib, it means "effort, striving, toil." Hence it implies a sense of journeying. (2) Others have defined it as "one's toiling in action in a way that affects and impresses the soul." This meaning also implies a sense of journeying because the word is made transitive by the preposition *ilá* (toward). Therefore, there is an element of journeying and traveling in the word *kadḥ* either way.

… and you will encounter Him: This is added to *You are laboring*. The sentence clarifies that humankind's journey, toil and endeavor will end in God, in the sense that He is their Lord. In other words, since humans are owned and directed as servants, they inevitably strive toward God, Who is their Owner, Director and Master. Servants are not entitled to any decision or action with respect to themselves. Therefore, they are not supposed to will or act anything except what their Lord has willed and commanded, because they will be accountable for their decisions and actions.

Based on our explanation, we can deduce three points: (1) This statement—*You are laboring toward your Lord laboriously*—is an argument for afterlife. (2) The encountering or meeting of God means a state where the only rule and judgment that is effective and active is that of God; and where the servants are not veiled from their Lord [by any intermediate cause or force]. (3) The verse is addressed to the human being *qua* human. The word *al-insān* (man, the human being) is meant in a generic sense because God's Lordship applies to all humankind.

The first inference can further be elaborated as follows:

(a) Lordship [of God] necessitates servitude [of humans, since they are relational qualities].

(b) Servitude entails accountability.

(c) Accountability means returning [to one's master] for the reckoning of deeds.

(d) Reckoning entails payment.

(e) Hence, there shall be resurrection.

فَأَمَّا مَنْ أُوتِيَ كِتَابَهُ بِيَمِينِهِ ۝٧

(84:7) ***Then as for him who is given his record in his right hand,***

The last verse—*You are laboring toward your Lord* (84:6)—implied that there shall be a return to God, where one is questioned about one's deeds and reckoned for them. This verse elaborates on these subsequent stages.

Given the mention of *reckoning* below (84:8), what is meant by *record* here is the record of deeds. We already discussed the meaning of receiving one's record in the right hand in Sūrah al-Isrāʾ and Sūrah al-Ḥāqqah.[1]

فَسَوْفَ يُحَاسَبُ حِسَابًا يَسِيرًا ﴿٨﴾

(84:8) ***he shall soon receive an easy reckoning,***

This means taking it easy and not being picky about the details.

وَيَنْقَلِبُ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِ مَسْرُورًا ﴿٩﴾

(84:9) ***and he will return to his families*** **(ahlihi)** ***joyfully.***

Given the context, *ahl* (family, folk, people) here means heavenly beings that God has set aside for the person, such as houris (heavenly spouses) and *ghilmān* (heavenly youths, heavenly servants). Here are two other suggested meanings:

(1) Their families in this world who were believers and will enter paradise.

(2) Believers in general. Even though they may not have any family ties, all believers are brethren nevertheless.

Comment: Neither of these two views is quite apparent.

وَأَمَّا مَنْ أُوتِيَ كِتَابَهُ وَرَاءَ ظَهْرِهِ ﴿١٠﴾

(84:10) ***But as for him who is given his record behind his back,***

Perhaps the reason why they will be given their records from behind is that their faces will be turned backwards, as God says: *before We blot out the faces and turn them backwards* (4:47).[2]

There is no contradiction between giving their books from behind and giving their books from the left, as mentioned in the verse: *But as for him who is given his book in his left hand, he will say, "I wish I had not been given my book"* (69:25). In our subsequent examination of narrations, we

1 See verses 17:71 and 69:19. For the former, see volume 25, pp. 228-229 of the English translation. (Ed.)

2 There is an omitted preposition *min* (from) in this verse. The implied meaning is: "*from* behind his back." That is why the word *warāʾ* is *manṣūb* in terms of inflection: it is due to the omission of a particle that assigns the oblique case (*nazʿ al-khāfiḍ*). (Auth.)

shall see the meaning of receiving one's book from behind.

فَسَوْفَ يَدْعُو ثُبُورًا ﴿١١﴾

(84:11) ***he will pray for annihilation*** **(thubūran),**

Thubūr is similar to *wayl*, meaning *halāk* (death, destruction, loss). "Praying for annihilation" means saying: *wā thubūrāh*.[1]

وَيَصْلَىٰ سَعِيرًا ﴿١٢﴾

(84:12) ***and he will enter a blaze.***

They will enter a blazing fire that is beyond description, and will suffer its tremendous heat.

إِنَّهُ كَانَ فِي أَهْلِهِ مَسْرُورًا ﴿١٣﴾

(84:13) ***Indeed he used to be joyful among his family,***

They used to rejoice over acquiring worldly possessions. Their souls were pulled by the ornaments of this world, and that made them forget the hereafter. God has condemned those who rejoice in worldly goods, and has called it "unrightful joy": *That is because you used to rejoice on the earth without right, and because you used to walk exultantly* (40:75).

إِنَّهُ ظَنَّ أَنْ لَنْ يَحُورَ ﴿١٤﴾

(84:14) ***and indeed he thought he would never return*** **(yaḥūra).**

What is meant here is returning to one's Lord for reckoning and retribution.[2] What makes one dismiss this prospect is absorption in sin and wrongdoing, which turn one's attention away from the hereafter, and make resurrection seem like a far-fetched myth.

بَلَىٰ إِنَّ رَبَّهُ كَانَ بِهِ بَصِيرًا ﴿١٥﴾

1 This is an exclamatory expression that indicates regret and despair. It effectively means: "Alas! Oh no! Woe is me! What a mess! Damn it!" For Qur'anic equivalents and insights on this, see verses 19:23, 25:13-14, 43:77, 69:27, 78:40. (Ed.)

2 The verb *yaḥūru* is synonymous with *yarjiʿu* (to return). (Auth.)

(84:15) *Yes indeed* (balá)*, indeed his Lord was ever seeing him.*

The word *balá* (of course, rather, nay) rejects their above mentioned supposition. It means: "It is not as they have imagined, but rather they will return."

… indeed his Lord was ever seeing him: This sentence justifies the previous rejection of their speculation. God is their Lord, meaning their Owner and the Director of their affairs. His knowledge encompasses them, and He sees whatever they do. He has ordained their obligations, and has set rewards and punishments for their deeds. Hence, it is inevitable that they will return to their Lord, and He will recompense them as they deserve according to their actions. This should clarify that this sentence—*indeed his Lord was ever seeing him*—involves an argument for the necessity of afterlife, much like what we said regarding the verse: *You are laboring toward your Lord* (84:6).

Based on the last nine verses [84:7-15], we can deduce that the reckoning of deeds will be a subsequent stage to the distribution of the records and the unrolling of the scrolls. This can be confirmed by the following verses: *We have attached every person's omen to his neck, and We shall bring it out for him on the Day of Resurrection as a wide open book that he will encounter. "Read your book! Today your soul suffices as your own reckoner"* (17:13-14).

As one can see, the above verses identify the disbelievers as those who will be given their books from behind. This raises a question concerning believers who have committed major sins. According to narrations through both Sunni and Shia chains, they will enter hell, will stay there for some time, and will then be released from it through [the Prophet's] intercession. The problem is that this group will not receive their records from behind since that is only applicable to the disbelievers [84:10-14]. Nor will they receive their records in their right hand because the verses suggest that such will be the fate of the People of the Right Hand (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*), who will pass an easy reckoning and enter paradise [84:7-9]. And it is not plausible to say that they will not be given any record at all, since the Qur'an says, using a universal expression: *We have attached every person's omen to his neck* (17:13). Here are some suggested explanations by the exegetes:

(1) They will be given their records in their right hand *after* they exit hell.

Comment: The apparent sense of the verses—though they are not

explicit—is that entering hell or paradise is subsequent to reckoning, which itself is subsequent to the distribution of the records and the unrolling of the scrolls. Hence, it does not make sense to receive one's record *after* exiting hell.

(2) They will be given their records in their left hand, whereas the disbelievers will be given their records from behind, as we saw in the verses above.

Comment: Verses which talk about receiving one's book in the left hand are in Sūrah al-Wāqiʿah [56:41ff], Sūrah al-Ḥāqqah [69:25ff], and an equivalent verse in Sūrah al-Isrāʾ [17:72]. These verses are also applicable to the disbelievers exclusively. Overall, it seems that those who will be given their records in their left hand will be the same as those who will be given their records from behind.

(3) Perhaps they too will receive their records in their right hand, but they are not qualified for *he shall soon receive an easy reckoning* (84:8). That verse describes the whole by an attribute of a subset of them.[1]

Comment: Such loose way expression is not permissible in this context, because the very theme of the verses is to distinguish between the felicitous and the wretched, and to identify the payment of each group specifically. This leaves no room for bundling some of those who will be punished with those who will go to paradise. Moreover, *he shall soon receive…* (84:8) is a good promise from God. It does not make sense to make such a promise to those who are not qualified for it, even if it is only at the apparent level of meaning.

The last suggestion can perhaps be justified as follows: Ease and hardship are relative terms. Hence, it could be that the reckoning of the sinful believers would be easy *relative* to the reckoning of the disbelievers who are doomed to hell forever, even though it would be difficult in comparison to the reckoning of the Godwary.

Another possible explanation is: The division of all people into the People of the Right Hand and the People of the Left Hand is not exhaustive. We can deduce this from the following verses: *you will be three groups: The People of the Right Hand—and what are the People of the Right Hand? And the People of the Left Hand—and what are the People of the Left Hand?*

1 In other words, while all believers will receive their records in their right hand, not all of them will have a smooth reckoning. (Ed.)

And the Foremost Ones are the foremost ones: they are the ones brought near [to Allah] (56:7-11). These verses show that *the ones brought near* are a separate category from the other two groups. The same can be said about *al-mustaḍ*ᶜ*afūn* (the disadvantaged, the oppressed, the abased), as inferred from the verse: *[There are] others waiting Allah's verdict: either He shall punish them, or turn to them clemently* (9:106).

Therefore, it may be argued that classifying the people into the People of the Right Hand and the People of the Left Hand is not an exhaustive classification that encompasses everyone. Rather, it only includes two groups on two extremes: (1) the Godwary among the inhabitants of paradise; and (2) those who shall abide in hell eternally. These are the two groups which will be given their records in their right hand and their left hand, respectively. The verses only discuss them because the main theme and message here is to urge the people to adhere to faith and *taqwá* (Godwariness, self-restraint, piety). A similar classification to this can be seen in Sūrah al-Mursalāt, which describes *the Day of Judgment* (77:13-14), but then it only touches on the deniers [77:15ff] and the Godwary [77:41ff], even though not everyone falls into one of these two groups. A similar case can be observed in Chapters 78, 79, 80, 82, 83 and other sūrahs. The purpose in all these chapters is to present some role models and concrete examples for the people of faith and obedience, and the people of disbelief and defiance. The verses are silent about other groups because their mandate is to show the audience that the key to happiness is *taqwá*, while disobedience and rebellion are the road to wretchedness.[1]

فَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِالشَّفَقِ ﴿١٦﴾

(84:16) ***So I swear by the evening glow*** **(bil-shafaq)*!***

Shafaq is the sequence of red, yellow and white hues that appear on the horizon at sunset and the outset of the night.

وَاللَّيْلِ وَمَا وَسَقَ ﴿١٧﴾

1 Overall, the author offers two possible views concerning the sinful believers: (1) They will also receive their records of deeds in their right hand, but their reckoning will be more meticulous than that of the Godwary believers. (2) We cannot know their situation from the current verses, since that is beyond the scope of the current verses. (Ed.)

(84:17) ***By the night and what it envelops*** **(wasaqa)*!***

Wasaqa means "to gather, to combine, to bring together." While humans and animals naturally go out and scatter during the day, they retire to their homes at night to rest. Some have interpreted *wasaqa* as *ṭarada* (to drive out, to dispel, to expel), referring to the stars being brought out of disappearance to appear at night.

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وَالْقَمَرِ إِذَا اتَّسَقَ ﴿١٨﴾

(84:18) ***By the moon when it blooms full*** **(ittasaqa)*!***

Ittisāq means "gathering, putting together." The meaning is: "By the moon as it compiles and completes its light, until it becomes a full moon."

لَتَرْكَبُنَّ طَبَقًا عَنْ طَبَقٍ ﴿١٩﴾

(84:19) ***You will surely fare from stage to stage (ṭabaq).***

This verse is the complement of the oaths in the previous verses [84:16-18], and is addressed to all people. *Ṭabaq* means "something that matches another thing" or "the state of correspondence and matching," whether one side is above the other or not. What is meant here are the stages that humans pass in their toilsome journey toward their Lord, in the following sequence: life in this world, death, life in *barzakh* (the intermediate realm between this life and the resurrection), transition to the hereafter, life in the hereafter, reckoning and retribution. This verse shows that the stages that humans traverse on their journey toward their Lord are sequentially connected to one another.

As we can see, the oaths in these verses emphasize the message of the verse, *O man! You are laboring…* (84:6), and the theme of resurrection in the subsequent verses. The oaths also set the stage for the surprise and censure reflected in the verse, *So what is the matter with them that they will not believe?* (84:20), and the warning and glad tidings at the end: *So give them tidings of a painful punishment…* (84:24-25).

فَمَا لَهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾ وَإِذَا قُرِئَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْقُرْآنُ لَا يَسْجُدُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

(84:20-21) ***So what is the matter with them that they will not believe? And when the Qur'an is recited to them they will not prostrate?***

These verses are rhetorical questions that convey surprise and rebuke. This matches the shift of address in the verses, where the people are treated in the third person instead of the second person. It is as though God is turning His attention from the people to the Prophet since He saw that they do not pay heed to His reminder, nor take admonition from His exhortation. Thus He addresses the Prophet: *So what is the matter with them that they will not believe?…* (84:20-21).

بَلِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا يُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾ وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يُوعُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

(84:22-23) ***Rather, the faithless deny*** **(yukadhdhibūna)*****, and Allah knows best what they harbor*** **(yūʿūna, from īʿāʾ).**

The present tense of the verb *deny* indicates persistence and continuation. They are referred to as *the faithless* [instead of using a pronoun] to indicate the cause of their denial. *Īʿāʾ* (to harbor, to hold, to entertain) is defined as "putting something in a *wiʿāʾ* (container, receptacle)." The meaning is: "They have not turned their backs to faith due to any insufficiency in the message or any lack of proof for it. Rather, they have followed their forefathers and their chiefs. Thus they are deeply rooted in disbelief and continuous denial. But God is well aware of the disbelief and polytheism that they have accumulated and hidden in their hearts."

and Allah knows best what they harbor: Some exegetes have interpreted this verse as follows: "Besides their denial, they hold other secrets in their hearts which are ineffable and unknown to everyone save God." However, this meaning is not quite congruous with the context.

فَبَشِّرْهُمْ بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ ﴿٢٤﴾

(84:24) ***So give them tidings*** **(fa-bashshirhum, from tabshīr)** ***of a painful punishment,***

The letter *fāʾ* (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of this verse indicates that this statement is drawn as a conclusion to their above mentioned denial [84:22]. The verb *tabshīr* (to give glad tiding, to give good news) is used for punishment as an expression of mocking and sarcasm.

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ ﴿٢٥﴾

(84:25) ***except such as are faithful and do righteous deeds: then they shall have an unfailing*** **(ghayr mamnūn)** ***reward.***

This is an unconnected exception to the pronoun "them" in *So warn them* (84:24).[1] The reward of the righteous believers will be without any expression that would burden, humiliate or abuse the receiver.[2]

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning *When the sky is split open* (84:1) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: That is the Day of Resurrection.

(2) [Imam] ʿAlī said: The sky will split from[3] its border lines.[4]

(3) Concerning *When the earth is spread out, and throws out what is in it, emptying itself* (83:3-4) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: The earth will stretch out and split asunder. Then the people will come out of it.

(4) The Prophet said: The earth will stretch on the Day of Resurrection like the stretching of a hide that is tanned [into leather]. Yet, the share of every child of Adam will be only enough room to stand on their feet.[5]

(5) Imam ʿAlī said: People on that day will have different conditions and ranks. Some will have an easy reckoning, and will [then] proceed happily to their family. Some will enter paradise without any reckoning, for they did not have anything to do with worldly matters. Reckoning on that day will be for those who get engaged here [with worldly matters]. Some will be reckoned for every dot

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1 An "unconnected exception" (*istithnāʾ munqaṭiʿ*, *istithnāʾ munfaṣil*) is where what is excepted is not a member of the original group. Such exceptions effectively convey two independent statements. (Ed.)

2 This is based on *mamnūn* being derived from *minnah* (obligation, reproach), which is when a benefactor reminds the beneficiary about their favor in order to make them feel obliged. The same statement is repeated almost verbatim in verse 95:6 below, where the author has interpreted *mamnūn* as *maqṭūʿ* (severed, interrupted, cut off). The meaning would be: "They will have an unfailing and unceasing reward." This is more compatible with the context, its Qur'anic usage, and the original meaning of *mann*. (Ed.)

3 Apparently what is meant is that it will split along the lines and borders which mark the galaxies. (Ed.)

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

5 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Ḥākim, through a good chain of narration, on the authority of Jābir.

and thread, and will [then] proceed to the blazing punishment.[1]

(6) Imam al-Bāqir said: Once the Messenger of God said: "Anyone who is summoned for reckoning will be punished."
He was asked, "O Messenger of God! What about the verse: *he shall soon receive an easy reckoning* (84:8)?"
He explained, "That is *ʿarḍ* (presentation, display, appearance),"[2] which means skimming through and looking over.[3]

(7) Imam al-Bāqir said: *Then as for him who is given his record in his right hand* (84:7): This refers to Abū Salamah b. ʿAbd al-Aswad b. Hilāl al-Makhzūmī, who was from the tribe Banū Makhzūm. *But as for him who is given his record behind his back* (84:10): This refers to his brother, al-Aswad b. ʿAbd al-Aswad al-Makhzūmī, who was killed in the Battle of Badr by Ḥamzah b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib.[4]

(8) According to some narrations, *you will surely fare from stage to stage* (84:19) means from hardship to hardship, including life, then death, then resurrection, then retribution.[5]

(9) It is narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq and Abū ʿUbayddah: You shall pursue the same paths and states as the early nations before you.[6]

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1 *Al-Iḥtijāj*.

2 Given the Sunni versions, apparently the rest is either an explanation from the Imam or from one of the transmitters. What is meant is that "easy reckoning" in verse 84:8 is not really reckoning, strictly and literally speaking. Rather, it is a quick display of one's acts, and a glance over one's record by God. (Ed.)

3 *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ibn Sinān. A similar narration is reported in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī and others, on the authority of ʿĀʾishah.

4 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

5 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, via an unconnected chain of transmission (*marfūʿ*).

6 *Jawāmiʿ al-Jāmiʿ*.

Chapter 85

al-Burūj (The Constellations)

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Verses 1-22

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful.

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 22 verses. It comprises of warning and glad tiding. It harshly criticizes those who persecuted the believing men and women for their faith in God, which is what the polytheists in Mecca used to do to those who had believed in the Prophet. They persecuted the believers to force them to revert to their former polytheism. Some of those believers persevered patiently and did not turn back on Islam, regardless of what it entailed for them. Others reneged and returned—that was the case of the weak believers, as described elsewhere: *Among the people there are those who say, "We have faith in Allah," but if such a one is tormented in Allah's cause, he takes persecution by the people for Allah's punishment* (29:10); *And among the people are those who worship Allah on the [very] fringe: if good fortune befalls him, he is content with it; but if an ordeal visits him he makes a turnabout* (22:11).

As a prelude to this main theme, God first alludes to the story of the People of the Ditch, which itself encourages the believers to be steadfast and patient in God's way. Later, He makes reference to the story of the hosts—namely, Pharaoh and Thamūd—which gives assurance to the Prophet about God's promise of support, and threatens the polytheists. The sūrah is Meccan as its content shows.

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وَ السَّماءِ ذاتِ الْبُرُوجِ ۝١

(85:1) ***By the heaven, possessed of constellations*** **(al-burūj)*!***

Burūj is the plural of *burj*, which means "that which is visible and apparent." It is commonly used for castles since they stand out in view. It is also used for watch towers that are built on top of city walls for protection.

That is what is meant here, as per the verse: *Certainly We have appointed constellations in the heaven and adorned them for the onlookers, and We have guarded them from every outcast Satan* (15:16-17). Accordingly, *burūj* here means the position of heavenly bodies. Some exegetes have interpreted *burūj* in its astronomical sense, referring to the twelve signs of the zodiac. However, this is implausible.

The verse vows by the heaven which is protected by constellations. This vow is concordant with the warning and glad tiding that come next, as we shall explain below.

وَ الْيَوْمِ الْمَوْعُودِ ﴿٢﴾

(85:2) ***By the Promised Day!***

The verse vows *by the Promised Day*, which is the Day of Resurrection. That is when God has promised to judge among His servants.[1]

وَ شاهِدٍ وَ مَشْهُودٍ ﴿٣﴾

(85:3) ***By the Witness and by the Witnessed!***

This verse offers two further oaths, added to *the heaven* (85:1). Hence, these verses [85:1-3] offer a series of four vows which serve the purpose of the chapter. As we said, the chapter's message is a vehement criticism of those who persecute the believing men and women for their faith, and a graceful promise to those who believe and do righteous deeds.

It is as though the verses are saying: "I swear by the heaven which has heavenly stations through which God deflects the devils: God will indeed ward off from believers the stratagems of devils and their companions among the disbelievers. I swear by the Promised Day when everyone will be compensated for their deeds; I swear by the Witness who observes the deeds of the disbelievers and their mistreatment of the believers for their faith; I swear by the Witnessed which shall be observed and seen by everyone: *Indeed those who persecute the faithful men and women…* (85:10-11)."

Given our explanation, what is meant by the word *shahādah* (witnessing, testifying) in this verse—both in *shāhid* (witness) and in *mashḥud*

1 The letter *wāw* (by, and) at the beginning of the verse adds a second vow to: *By the heaven* (85:1). (Auth.)

(witnessed)—is "being present in a scene," not "testifying in a court."[1] This means that *the Witness* can be matched with the Prophet because he observes the deeds of his nation in this world, and will then testify to that on the Day of Resurrection. Then there are three possible interpretations for *the Witnessed*: (1) The persecution and torture of the believers by the disbelievers. (2) The disbelievers' retribution for this act. (3) What will come to pass on the Day of Resurrection, including the punishments of the oppressors and the rewards of the oppressed. In the original Arabic, both *shāhid* (witness) and *mashhūd* (witnessed) are mentioned in the indefinite form, which indicates aggrandizement and glorification.[2]

Exegetes have offered many interpretations for, *by the Witness and the Witnessed*, in some cases reaching thirty views. Here are some of their suggestions:

(1) *The Witnessed* is Friday. *The Witnessed* is the Day of ʿArafah.

(2) *The Witnessed* is the Day of Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha, Yawm al-Naḥr). *The Witnessed* is the Day of ʿArafah.

(3) *The Witness* is the Day of ʿArafah. *The Witnessed* is the Day of Resurrection.

(4) *The Witness* is the angel which will testify against humankind. *The Witnessed* is the Day of Resurrection.

(5) *The Witness* are those who will testify against the people [on the Day of Judgment]. *The Witnessed* are those who are testified against.

(6) *The Witness* is this nation [of Muslims]. *The Witnessed* are the other nations.

(7) *The Witness* are one's organs and limbs. *The Witnessed* is one's soul.

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1 If the latter were intended, it should have been used with the preposition ʿ*alá* (against, over, on), because that is how the second meaning of *shahādah* is used. (Auth.)
These are two sequential stages of witnessing: First one has to be present in the scene when an act is done. Then such a person can testify in a court to what they have seen in the scene. The Qur'an has used *shahādah* and its derivatives in both meanings. However, when used with reference to the hereafter—such as the current verses, as clearly indicated by verse 85:2—it means testimony, not observation. The author's view is consistent with his approach to *tafsīr*: he gives a higher priority to the *theme of the chapter* and the *immediate context* of a verse over the more universal Qur'anic usage of a term. (Ed.)

2 It means: "By such a witness, and by such a thing that is witnessed." (Ed.)

(8) *The Witness* is the Black Stone (*al-ḥajar al-aswad*, in the south-eastern corner of the Kaʿbah). *The Witnessed* are the pilgrims.
(9) *The Witness* are nights and days. *The Witnessed* is humankind.
(10) *The Witness* are the prophets. *The Witnessed* is Prophet Muḥammad.
(11) *The Witness* is God. *The Witnessed* is *lā ilāh illā Allāh* (there is no god but God).
(12) *The Witness* are the creatures. *The Witnessed* is the Truth [that is, God].
(13) *The Witness* is God. *The Witnessed* is the Day of Resurrection.
(14) *The Witness* is Adam and his descendants. *The Witnessed* is the Day of Resurrection.
(15) *The Witness* is the Day of Tarwiyah (eighth of Dhū al-Ḥijjah). *The Witnessed* is the Day of ʿArafah (ninth of Dhū al-Ḥijjah).
(16) *The Witness* is Monday. *The Witnessed* is Friday.
(17) *The Witness* are *al-muqarrabūn* (those brought nigh, the near most ones). *The Witnessed* is *ʿIlliyyūn* [83:18-21].
(18) *The Witness* is the infant in the story of the People of the Ditch, who said to his mother, "Be patient, for indeed you are on the right path." *The Witnessed* is that incident.
(19) *The Witness* are the angels which replace one another [every day and night] to record the deeds. *The Witnessed* is *the dawn recital* (17:78).

Comment: As one can see, most of these views assume *shahādah* (witnessing, testifying) to mean "delivering a testimony in the court." Moreover, some of them have not applied a consistent sense of *shahādah* to *the Witness and the Witnessed*. We already explained that *shahādah* in the sense of testimony is not a plausible meaning here. Rather, it is more congruent with the context to interpret *shahādah* as "observation, seeing," though that may entail delivering what one has observed in the court of God on the Day of Resurrection.

The Witness can plausibly be matched with the Prophet. This should be of no surprise because God has called him *shāhid* (witness) and *shahīd* (ever-witness) in the Qur'an: *O Prophet! Indeed We have sent you as a witness* (shāhidan), *as a bearer of good news and as a warner* (33:45);[1] *So that the Messenger may be a witness* (shahīdan) *to you* (22:78). We already explained the meaning of witnessing the actions [of people] by

1 The same expression is mentioned in verse 48:8. (Ed.)

the witnesses.[1]

The complement to the vows in these verses [85:1-3] is omitted, but can be inferred from two verses below: *Indeed those who persecute the faithful men and women…* (85:10-11). It can also be inferred from the next verses: *Perish the People of the Ditch…* (85:5ff). The vows emphasize the underlying message of these verses, which is twofold: (1) threatening the persecutors; and (2) promising the righteous believers [at the time of the Prophet] that if they persevere sincerely like the believers in the story of the People of the Ditch, God will fortify them to patiently preserve their faith from the schemes of those who plot against them.

قُتِلَ أَصْحابُ الْأُخْدُودِ ﴿٤﴾

(85:4) *Perish* (qutila) *the People of the Ditch* (al-ukhdūd)*!*

This verse is not a complement to the oaths in the previous verses [85:1-3]. Rather, it alludes to a story that prepares the ground for a subsequent verse: *Indeed those who persecute the faithful men and women…* (85:10).

Ukhdūd means "furrow, trench, pit." *The People of the Ditch* were oppressors who dug ditches in the ground, filled them with fire, and ordered believers to jump into them. Thus they burnt all of the believers as a price for their faith. Therefore, the verb *qutila* is meant in its imperative sense (perish, damn, kill), as an imprecation on them. What is meant by *qatl* (killing) here is being driven away and deprived from God's mercy.

Some have suggested that *the People of the Ditch* are the believing men and women who were burnt in those ditches, and the verb *qutila* is meant in the past tense (killed), asserting their murder through burning. This view is unlikely given the pronouns in three verses below: *above which they* (85:6); *as they were themselves witnesses to what they did* (85:7); *They were vindictive* (85:8). These pronouns refer to *the People of the Ditch* in the current verse, but they can only be matched with the persecutors, not the victims—especially in the second and third cases [85:7-8].

النَّارِ ذاتِ الْوَقُودِ ﴿٥﴾

(85:5) *The fire, abounding in fuel* (al-waqūd),

1 See volume 2, pp. 153ff of the English translation, under verse 2:143; and volume 12, pp. 13-15, under verses 5:106-109. (Ed.)

This verse is a *badal* (apposition, replacement, interpretation) for *the Ditch* (85:5). *Waqūd* is "any substance that produces fire" such as logs and the like. Describing the fire as *abounding in fuel* indicates its great size, intensity and heat.

إِذْ هُمْ عَلَيْها قُعُودٌ ﴿٦﴾

(85:6) ***above which they sat***

The verse describes the state of the oppressors: they were sitting around the fire, with full view of it.

وَ هُمْ عَلى ما يَفْعَلُونَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ شُهُودٌ ﴿٧﴾

(85:7) ***as they were themselves witnesses to what they did to the faithful.***

They were present at the scene, watching how they burnt the believers, and how they were consumed.

وَ ما نَقَمُوا مِنْهُمْ إِلاَّ أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ ﴿٨﴾

(85:8) ***They were vindictive towards them only because they had faith in Allah, the Ever-Mighty, the Ever-Praiseworthy,***

Naqam means "intense dislike." The meaning is: "They hated the believers simply for their belief in God. The believers were burnt solely on a charge of faith."

الَّذِي لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّماواتِ وَ الْأَرْضِ وَ اللَّهُ عَلى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿٩﴾

(85:9) ***to whom belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and Allah is witness to all things.***

This verse, as well as the ending of the last verse, present several attributes of God which prove a few points: (i) The believers were rightful in their faith. (ii) The way they were treated was unjust. (iii) God is well aware of what they endured. (iv) He will give them an excellent reward. As corollaries of these points, we can also deduce the following: (v) The oppressors' beliefs were false. (vi) They were defiant to God. (vii) What they did was unjust. (viii) Soon they will taste the consequence of their deeds.

The divine attributes in these verses can be elaborated as follows:

(1) *The Ever-Mighty*: He is an Invincible Lord that can never be defeated whatsoever.
(2) *The Ever-Praiseworthy*: All His acts are fair and splendid. These two qualities imply that all majesty (*jalāl*) and beauty (*jamāl*) belongs to Him. Thus, it is incumbent on His servants to be humble before Him, and to not incur His wrath.
(3) *To whom belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth:* He is the absolute sovereign of the universe. All command and judgment belongs to Him. This means that He is the Lord of all worlds. Hence, it is incumbent on His servants to worship Him as their God, and to not associate any partners with Him. This means that those who believe in Him have hit the mark, while the disbelievers are lost in the dark.
(4) *And Allah is witness to all things:* No part of His creation or the acts they perform is veiled from God, Who is the Creator of all things. The good deeds of the virtuous and the evil deeds of the sinners are all present with Him. Thus, He will requite them all according to their actions.

In short, since God is characterized by these noble attributes, it was incumbent on the believers to believe in Him, and the oppressors had no right to interfere in their affair or persecute them.

Some exegetes have said: The polytheists believed in God, albeit as a retired architect. They persecuted the believers not because of their faith in God, but because of their denial of the other gods. They did not recognize the God that the believers subscribed to [with the attributes that the believers held for Him]. This effectively reduces to denying the true God Who is characterized by the above mentioned attributes of majesty and beauty. That is why the verses state these qualities as the main problem of the polytheists.

Comment: This view suffers from not realizing that the polytheists—or idolaters—only ascribed the initial creation and existence of the world to God. Their problem was denying God of two further attributes, and holding them true only for their idols: (1) *rubūbiyyah* (lordship, authority, mastership), which means the direction and management of the universe; and (2) *ulūhiyyah* (divinity, godship), which qualifies one for being served and worshiped. That is why they *only* worshiped their gods, not their gods along with God. They viewed God only as the Lord of the lords and the Deity of the deities.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ فَتَنُوا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَ الْمُؤْمِناتِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَتُوبُوا فَلَهُمْ عَذابُ جَهَنَّمَ وَ لَهُمْ عَذابُ الْحَرِيقِ ﴿١٠﴾

(85:10) ***Indeed those who persecute*** **(fatanū, from fitnah)** ***the faithful men and women, and then do not repent, for them there is the punishment of hell, and for them there is the punishment of burning.***

Fitnah means "torture, trouble, distress." *Those who persecute* are meant in a broad sense, including not only the People of the Ditch, but also the polytheists of Quraysh who persecuted the followers of the Prophet. They would inflict a variety of tortures on these believing men and women in order to make them abandon their faith.

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> One may inquire: "How come the verse mentions *the punishment of hell* and *the punishment of burning* separately? Are they not the same?" The answer is: This is to show that their punishment will not be limited to burning. They will have other forms of pain in hell in addition to the fire, such as *Zaqqūm* [37:62, 44:43, 56:52], pus (*ghislīn*) [69:36] and clubs [22:21].

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَ عَمِلُوا الصَّالِحاتِ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِى مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهارُ ذلِكَ الْفَوْزُ الْكَبِيرُ ﴿١١﴾

(85:11) ***Indeed those who have faith and do righteous deeds—for them will be gardens with streams running in them. That is the supreme success.***

This verse gives glad tidings to the believers to comfort their souls, just as the last verse was a strong warning against the disbelievers who persecute and torture the believers.

إِنَّ بَطْشَ رَبِّكَ لَشَدِيدٌ ﴿١٢﴾

(85:12) ***Indeed your Lord's seizure*** **(baṭsh)** ***is severe.***

These seven verses [85:12-18] confirm and emphasize the warning and glad tidings in the previous verses. According to al-Rāghib, *baṭsh* (strike, assault, punishment) means "seizing something forcefully and/or fiercely."

This verse consoles the Prophet's soul by promising him support and victory. This is reflected in two points: (1) The verse refers to God as *Lord*. (2) It ascribes Lord to the Prophet: *your Lord*. It means: "The oppressors in your nation will also have their fair share of the above mentioned castigation."

إِنَّهُ هُوَ يُبْدِئُ وَ يُعِيدُ ﴿١٣﴾

(85:13) *It is indeed He Who originates* (yubdiʾu, from ibdāʾ) *and brings back again* (yuʿīdu, from iʿādah).

Ibdāʾ (to disclose, to display) in this verse is used synonymously with *badʾ* (to originate, to begin). This can be inferred from its contrast with *iʿādah* (to return, to restore). Some have said: "There is no such word as *ibdāʾ* among Arabs, but that is how the verse is recited." Some rare recitations say: *yabdaʾu* (He begins, He initiates; from *badʾ*).

This verse provides two reasons for the message of the last verse, justifying why *your Lord's seizure is severe* (85:12): (1) He brings to existence anything that He wills originally, without resorting to assistance from anything or anyone else. (2) He restores any being or state that expires to how it was before it expired. These two qualities prove God's omnipotence over anything that He wills. No transient being can escape Him. If so, it follows that He can inflict on a servant who transgresses His limits a punishment that is beyond the servant's capacity, and can maintain the servant in that condition so that they would continue to taste the punishment. God says: *As for the faithless there is for them the fire of hell: they will neither be done away with so that they may die, nor shall its punishment be lightened for them* (35:36). Likewise, He is capable of bringing anything that is destroyed by punishment back to its original form so that the sinner may suffer the pain endlessly: *Indeed those who defy Our signs, We shall soon make them enter a Fire: as often as their skins become scorched, We shall replace them with other skins, so that they may taste the punishment* (4:56).

Our explanations should clarify three points: (1) The verse's expression—*It is indeed He Who originates*—indicates exclusivity. That is, the origination and return of existence are the jurisdiction of God alone. This is because it is God alone Who creates and gives existence. (2) God is the One Who sets the limits where things end at. If He wills, He can choose to not limit something, or to change its limit. He has set the limit of punishment and torture in this world to be death. But if He chooses to, He can lift that limit, as in the case of punishment in the hereafter. (3) His *baṭsh* (seizure, assault, strike) is severe [85:12] in the sense that no one can deflect

His seizing; no one can overcome anything that He commands. The only possibility is that one divine command may qualify and take precedence over another.

وَ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الْوَدُودُ ﴿١٤﴾

(85:14) ***And He is the Ever-forgiving, the Ever-Lover,***

These two attributes refer to God's abundant forgiveness and love. They correspond to His good promise to the believers, just as verse 85:12 (*Indeed your Lord's seizure…*) pertains to His warning to the disbelievers.

ذُو الْعَرْشِ الْمَجِيدُ ﴿١٥﴾

(85:15) ***Lord of the Throne*** **(al-ʿarsh),** ***the Ever-Glorious*** **(al-Majīd),**

ʿ*Arsh* means "a king's throne." *Lord of the Throne* is used metaphorically, indicating God's sovereignty.[1] He is a King that can exercise absolute authority over His kingdom, and can rule as He wills. *Majīd* means possessor of *majd*, which is "spiritual greatness and magnificence." This amounts to perfection in terms of essence and attributes.

فَعَّالٌ لِما يُرِيدُ ﴿١٦﴾

(85:16) ***Doer of what He wills.***

No one can impede God from His will and decree. This applies to both internal impediments—such as boredom, sloth, exhaustion and change of mind—as well as external ones.

The last two verses [85:15-16] prove that God has the right and power to threaten those who persecute the believers with hell, and to promise paradise to those who believe and do righteous deeds. This is because He is *Lord of the Throne, the Ever-Glorious* (85:15). And He does not break His promise since He is the *Doer of what He wills* (85:16).

هَلْ أَتاكَ حَدِيثُ الْجُنُودِ ﴿١٧﴾ فِرْعَوْنَ وَ ثَمُودَ ﴿١٨﴾

(85:17-18) ***Did you receive the story of the hosts of Pharaoh and Thamūd?***

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1 For more on God's Throne, see volume 15 of the English translation, pp. 220-224 and 230-238, under verse 7:54. (Ed.)

These verses reiterate God's severe seizure [85:12], and His quality of being an Ever-Glorious King [85:15] Who is the Doer of what He wills [85:16]. The verses also comfort the Prophet and solace His noble soul through referring to these stories.

بَلِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فِي تَكْذِيبٍ ﴿١٩﴾

(85:19) ***Rather* (bal)*, the faithless dwell in denial,***

Given the context and flow of the verses, apparently *the faithless* here are the disbelievers among the Prophet's tribe. The transitional word *bal* (rather, nay) indicates that the previous admonitions and arguments are ineffective. The meaning is: "One should not hope that these people would believe in these clear signs and verses, because the faithless insist on their denial. Thus no admonition or argument is beneficial to them."

وَ اللَّهُ مِنْ وَرائِهِمْ مُحِيطٌ ﴿٢٠﴾

(85:20) ***and Allah besieges them from all around* (warāʾihim).**

Warāʾ means "external dimensions that encompass something."[1] The verse is saying that they cannot defeat or outmaneuver God, because He surrounds and encompasses them from all sides. This verse also comforts the Prophet's soul

Some exegetes have suggested that the verse alludes to the disbelievers having turned their back to God. This interpretation is based on defining *warāʾ* as "behind."[2]

بَلْ هُوَ قُرْآنٌ مَجِيدٌ ﴿٢١﴾ فِي لَوْحٍ مَحْفُوظٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

(85:21-22) ***Rather* (bal)*, it is a glorious Qur'an, in a preserved tablet.***

The word *bal* (rather, nay) indicates a substitution and correction to their persistent denial of the Qur'an. The meaning is: "The matter is not as they claim. Rather, the Qur'an is a recited book (lit. *qurʾān*) that is magnificent in terms of meaning, brimming with divine teachings. It is

1 This is a broad sense which includes both before and behind. (Ed.)

2 The meaning would be: "The God—which they have ignored and left behind—encompasses them." (Ed.)

in a tablet which is preserved from falsehood and untruth, and protected from the reach of the devils."

Examining Narrations

(1) Once the Prophet was asked about [*burūj* in] the verse, *By the heaven, possessed of* burūj (85:1). He said: "It means the stars." Then he was asked about [*burūj* in] the verse, *He who appointed* burūjan *in the heaven* (25:61). He replied: "It means stars." Then he was asked about [*burūj* in] the verse *fortified* burūj (4:78) he said: "It means *quṣūr* (castles, palaces, mansions)."[1]

(2) The Messenger of God said: *The Promised Day* (85:2) is the Day of Resurrection. *The Witnessed* day (85:3) is the Day of ʿArafah. *The Witness* (85:3) is Friday.[2]

(3) [Imam] ʿAlī said: *The Promised Day* (85:2) is the Day of Resurrection. *The Witness* (85:3) is Friday. *The Witnessed* (85:3) is the Day of Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha, Yawm al-Naḥr).[3]

(4) A man said: Once I entered the Mosque of the Messenger of God, and saw someone narrating hadith from the Messenger of God. I asked him about *the Witness and the Witnessed* (85:3). He said, "*The Witness* is Friday, and *the Witnessed* is the Day of ʿArafah."
I moved on, and came across another person narrating hadith from the Messenger of God. I asked him the same question. He replied, "*The Witness* is Friday, and *the Witnessed* is the Day of Sacrifice."
I carried on, and met a boy whose face was shining like a gold dinar. He was also narrating hadith from the Messenger of God. I inquired, "Can you tell me about *the Witness and the Witnessed*

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Jābir b. ʿAbd-Allah.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Abī al-Dunyā's *al-Uṣūl*, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn Mardawayh and al-Bayhaqī's *al-Sunan*, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah. *Al-Durr al-manthūr* has also quoted a similar account from the Prophet through other chains of narration, on the authority of Abū Mālik, Saʿīd b. al-Musayyib and Jubayr b. Muṭʿim. The last one [from Jubayr b. Muṭʿim] says: "*The Witness* (85:3) is Friday, and *the Witnessed* (85:3) is the Day of ʿArafah." It has also narrated the same wording from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, on the authority ʿAbd al-Razzāq, al-Fāryābī, ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, Ibn Jarīr and Ibn al-Mundhir.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd and Ibn al-Mundhir.

(85:3)?" "Sure," he said. "*The Witness* is Muḥammad, and *the Witnessed* is the Day of Resurrection. Haven't you heard these words of God: *O Prophet! Indeed We have sent you as a witness, as a bearer of good news and as a warner* (33:45), and: *That is a day on which all humankind will be gathered, and it is a day witnessed [by all creatures]* (11:103)?"

I inquired about the first man. They said, "That was Ibn ʿAbbās." I asked about the second. They said, "He was Ibn ʿUmar." I inquired about the third. They said, "That was al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī."[1]

Author's comment: This account is also reported through other chains of narration with slight variations. As we explained in our exposition of the verse, Imam al-Ḥasan's interpretation is more congruent with the context of the verses, even though the words witness (*shāhid*) and witnessed (*mashhūd*) can also be matched with the other interpretations if we only look at the terms [irrespective of the context].

(5) Concerning *Perish the People of the Ditch* (85:4) *Tafīr al-Qummī* says: This relates to Dhū Nuwās, who instigated the Abyssinians to attack Yemen. He was the last Abyssinians ruler of the Ḥimyar dynasty. He converted to Judaism, and the entire tribe Ḥimyar followed suit. He changed his name to Joseph, and that went on for a while.

Then he was informed that there were some Christian remnants in Najrān [in Yemen]. The people there had long believed in Jesus and abided by the rulings of his Gospel. The leader of that religion [in that region] was ʿAbd-Allah b. Baryā.[2] The follow Jews with Dhū Nuwās urged him to advance toward them and force them to convert to Judaism. Thus he mobilized his forces until he reached Najrān. He rallied all the Christians there, and ordered them to convert to Judaism, but they refused. He argued with them and did everything within his means to convince them, yet they did not budge. They preferred to be killed than to convert.

So Dhū Nuwās dug a trench, filled it with firewood, and set it ablaze for them. Some of them were burnt in fire, while others were killed by the sword and mutilated severely. The number of those who were killed or burnt reached 20,000. One of them by the name of Daws Dhū Thaʿlabān fled from them on a racehorse

1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

2 This is also recorded as Baryāmin and Baryās. (Ed.)

that he had. They went after him, but lost him in the desert. Then Dhū Nuwās returned with his army to what he was doing. That is what God refers to in the verses: *Perish the People of the Ditch… the Ever-Mighty, the Ever-Praiseworthy* (85:4-8).

(6) When the people of Isfandahān[1]—who were Magians (Zoroastrians)—were defeated, ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb said, "These are neither Jews nor Christians. Nor do they have a scripture."

"In fact, they had a scripture," said ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, "but they lost it. The story is that one of their kings once got drunk and slept with his daughter (another version: with his sister). When he recovered his sobriety, he told her: "How should I vindicate myself of what I have done?"

"Assemble your subjects," she suggested, "and tell them that you consider marriage with one's daughter to be legal. Make it a new legislation among them."

So he gathered the people and told them about it, but they refused to follow him. Then the king dug a ditch in the ground, filled it with fire, and exposed them to it. Whoever refused the new law was flung into the flames, and whoever accepted was spared."[2]

(7) Once Imam ʿAlī sent an envoy [and/or a letter] to the archbishop of Najrān [in Yemen], asking him about the People of the Ditch, to which the archbishop replied. The Imam said [or wrote]: What you said is not accurate, but I shall tell you their story. They were an Abyssinian people, to whom God sent an Abyssinian prophet. They rejected him, so he fought against them. They killed some of his followers, and captivated the rest along with himself. Then they dug a ditch and filled it with fire. They gathered the people and said to them, "Those who follow our path should step back. But those who believe in the religion of these people must cast themselves into the fire."

The prophet's followers started throwing themselves into the fire one after another. Then there came a woman with a one-month-old baby. When she advanced, she trembled and felt pity for her baby. But the baby cried out, "Don't be afraid, mama! Cast me

1 It is not clear what city this name corresponds to, but the narration is about the Muslim conquest of Persia during ʿUmar's caliphate. (Ed.)

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Saʿīd b. Jubayr. The same idea is narrated from the Imam in al-*Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd.

and yourself into the fire. By God this is indeed little [sacrifice] in God's cause." Thus she jumped with her baby into the fire. That baby was one of those who spoke [miraculously] while still in the cradle."[1]

(8) [Imam] ʿAlī said: The prophet of the People of the Ditch was Abyssinian.[2]

(9) Concerning *the People of the Ditch* (85:4) [Imam] ʿAlī said: They were Abyssinians.[3]

Author's comment: One could arguably infer that the story of the People of the Ditch includes a number of incidents that occurred in Abyssinia, Yemen and Persia; and the verses [85:4ff] refer to all of them. There are also some accounts which mention the story without specifying its location.

(10) Concerning *Rather, it is a glorious Qur'an, in a preserved tablet* (85:21-22) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: The Preserved Tablet has two sides: one is on the right side of the Throne, and one is on the forehead of Isrāfīl (Seraphiel). When the Almighty Lord utters a revelation, the Tablet hits Isrāfīl's forehead. Thus he looks at the Tablet, and conveys what is there to Gabriel.

(11) The Messenger of God said: God has created a tablet from white pearl. Its two covers are from green *zabarjad* (chrysolite, emerald, aquamarine), and its text is from light. He looks at it 360 times a day, through which He creates, gives life, causes death, gives sustenance, honors, dishonors, and does whatever He wills.[4]

Author's comment: There are numerous narrations concerning the qualities of the Tablet with a wide variety. They should be viewed as symbolic representations (*tamthīl*).

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of Jābir, from Imam al-Bāqir. The same idea is narrated from the Imam in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh and ʿAbd-Allah b. Nujayy.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim and ʿAbd-Allah b. Nujayy.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Ibn Mundhir, and on the authority of al-Ḥasan.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Abū al-Shaykh and Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās.

Chapter 86

al-Ṭāriq (The Rising Star)

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Verses 1-17

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful.

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 17 verses. It warns people about the hereafter and proves it by drawing and emphasizing on God's omnipotence. It points to the reality of that day, and concludes by forewarning the disbelievers. The context of the sūrah suggests that it was revealed in Mecca.

وَالسَّمَاءِ وَالطَّارِقِ ﴿١﴾

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(86:1)*: By the sky, and by the nightly visitor* (al-ṭāriq)*!*

The root word *ṭarq* originally means "a sharp, audible blow." One of its derivatives is *miṭraqah* (hammer). Another one is *ṭarīq* (path), since the travelers strike the ground with their feet. The word then came to be used for traveling in general. More specifically, it is used for traveling at night, because those who arrive at night usually find the doors locked, and have to knock. The word *ṭāriq* is used for any incident that occurs at night. In this verse, *ṭāriq* means a star which rises at night.

By the sky, and by the nightly visitor: This verse is an oath sworn on the heavens and the star which rises at night.

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الطَّارِقُ ﴿٢﴾

almizan.org

(86:2)*: And what will show you what is the nightly visitor?*

This verse emphasizes what is being sworn upon—namely, *al-ṭāriq* (the nightly visitor).

النَّجْمُ الثَّاقِبُ ﴿٣﴾

(86:3)*: It is the brilliant* (al-thāqib) *star.*

The root meaning of *thaqb* is "piercing, tearing." It also implies "brilliance and illumination" because a bright object pierces the darkness with its light. It also implies height and elevation. For instance, when a bird soars high, it is said: *thaqab al-ṭayr*. It is as though the bird tears through the air as it flies.

This verse interprets and describes *the nightly visitor* (86:1-2). It is a response to an implied question, as if this were the dialogue:

"And what will show you what is the nightly visitor?" (86:2).

"What is the nightly visitor?"

"It is the brilliant star" (86:3).

إِنْ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ لَمَّا عَلَيْهَا حَافِظٌ ﴿٤﴾

(86:4)*: There is no soul except* (lammā) *that there is a guardian* (ḥāfiẓ) *over it.*

This is the main clause of the oath. The word *lammā* here is equivalent to *illā* (except, but, save). The meaning is: "There is no soul which does not have a guardian over it." The purpose of the *ḥāfiẓ* (guard, watcher, protector) is to write the good and evil deeds which issue from the person, so they may be accounted on the Day of Resurrection, and the person may be compensated for them. The guardian is an angel, and what is guarded is a person's acts; as God says: *Indeed, there are over you guardians, noble writers, who know whatever you do* (82:10-12).

It would not be far-fetched to interpret the "guarding of the souls" as the preservation of their essence and deeds. In this interpretation, *ḥāfiẓ* is meant as a genus.[1] It means that upon death, the guarded souls neither decay nor are destroyed, until God resurrects them to life by returning their souls. At that point, everyone will be the same person that they were in this world. Then they will be compensated according to their preserved deeds, whether good or evil. Many verses reinforce this idea, such as: *Say, "You will be fully captured by the angel of death, who has been charged with you"* (32:11); *Allah fully captures the souls at the time of their death, and those who have not died in their sleep. Then He retains those for whom He has ordained death* (39:42). This does not conflict with the verses we

1 In other words, the verse is not about particular guardian angels that each soul has, but it is about the preservation of the souls in general. (Ed.)

quoted from Sūrah al-Infiṭār [82:10-12], which implies that the guardian angels are recorders and scribes, because preserving the souls is also a kind of recording and scribing, as this verse suggests: *We used to record what you used to do* (45:29). We already discussed this idea [under verse 45:29].

Objection: The chapter cannot prove the resurrection based on God's omnipotence. Divine omnipotence applies only to what is possible, but returning human beings to their exact form is impossible because that would entail a second creation [not the same one as the first]. The second person that is created is only a *like* and *resemblance* of the first one, not the exact same person.

Response: Our explanation above should clarify the matter. What constitutes the reality of a person is their soul, not their body; and the soul is preserved. So, when a second body is created and the same soul is attached to it, that will be the exact same person that existed previously in this world—even if their body is a like or resemblance of the worldly body.

فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ مِمَّ خُلِقَ ۝٥

(86:5) ***So let man consider from what he was created.***

That is: "What is their origin? What was the original substance that God turned into a human being?" The letter *fā'* (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of this verse is mentioned as a conclusion to the overall theme and context of the previous verses. The effective meaning is: "Every soul has a guardian over its essence and deeds. Their essence and deeds neither perish, nor are forgotten. Therefore, humans must acknowledge that they will be returned to their Lord and compensated for their deeds. They should not consider this an unlikely possibility. To arrive at this conclusion and acknowledgment, they must reflect on their origin, and keep in mind that they were created from a fluid that issues from between the loins and ribs. The One Who set in motion their creation from a mere drop has the power to return them to life after death."

… he was created: This is stated in the passive voice, without mentioning God, the Creator. This usage alludes to the clarity of His work and involvement as the subject of the act. The same applies to the use of the passive voice in the next verse: *He was created from an effusing fluid* (86:6).

خُلِقَ مِنْ مَاءٍ دَافِقٍ ۝٦

(86:6) ***He was created from an effusing*** **(dāfiq, from dafq)** ***fluid,***

Dafq means "a rapid pouring and flowing of water." *An effusing fluid* is the semen. The verse acts as a response to an implied question prompted by the last verse: *from what he was created* (86:5).

يَخْرُجُ مِنْ بَيْنِ الصُّلْبِ وَالتَّرَائِبِ ﴿٧﴾

(86:7) *which issues from between the loins* (al-ṣulb) *and the ribs* (al-tarāʾib).

Ṣulb means "loins, back." *Tarāʾib* is the plural of *tarībah*, meaning "breastbones, ribs."[1] Exegetes have differed incredibly over this verse and the previous one. Apparently the verse's expression—*from between the loins and the ribs*—refers to a part of the body bounded by the bones of the loins and the bones of the chest.[2]

إِنَّهُ عَلَىٰ رَجْعِهِ لَقَادِرٌ ﴿٨﴾

(86:8) *Indeed He is able to bring him back [after death]* (rajʿihi),

Rajʿ is synonymous with *iʿādah* (returning, bringing back, restoring). The pronoun "He" refers to God. The verse should have naturally referred to God with a proper noun since there was no mention of Him in the previous verses. However, it only uses a pronoun because it is evident to Whom it refers. This is like the usage of the passive voice previously: *he was created* (86:5-6).

The meaning is: "The One Who created human beings from the aforementioned fluid is certainly capable of bringing them back to life after death, for their restoration is similar to their original creation." The power to do something implies the power to do something similar, for

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1 *Tirb* means "similar, equivalent, counterpart." It is used for almost any bone in the body that has a counterpart, such as the collarbones, the ribs, and the shoulder bones. In this verse, it can be interpreted as the two thighbones. *Between the loins and the thighbones* is a courteous indirect reference to the male reproductive organ. Maʿrifah, *al-Tamhīd fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān* (Qum: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1410), 6:64-65. Riḍāyī Iṣfahānī and others, *Tafsīr-i Qurʾān-i mihr* (Qum: Pazhūhish-hāyi Tafsīr va ʿUlūm-i Qurʾān, 2008), 22:157. (Ed.)

2 In his exegesis of the verse, al-Marāghī quotes a scientifically subtle explanation for the verse from some physicians. Interested readers should consult his *Tafsīr*. (Auth.)

similar events are governed by the same law in terms of possibilities and impossibility.

يَوْمَ تُبْلَى السَّرَائِرُ ﴿٩﴾

(86:9) ***on the day when the secrets*** **(al-sarāʾir, from sarīrah)** ***are examined*** **(tublá, from balāʾ)*:***

This verse identifies the time of returning. *Sarīrah* (secret, intention) is "what someone hides in one's heart and keeps to oneself." *Balāʾ* means "examining, making known, studying, investigating." The meaning is: "They will be returned on a day when whatever is hidden in their souls—including their beliefs and the consequences of their deeds, whether good or evil—will be revealed. The good and evil [beliefs and deeds] will be sifted apart, and people will be compensated accordingly." The meaning of the verse is similar to: *and whether you disclose what is in your hearts or hide it, Allah will bring you to account for it* (2:284).

فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَلَا نَاصِرٍ ﴿١٠﴾

(86:10) ***and he shall have neither power nor helper.***

One will have no strength to ward off God's punishment, nor will they have anyone who would defend them on their behalf. In other words, one will have no strength whatsoever to avoid the unpleasant consequences of their beliefs and actions, whether on their own or through the help of another.

وَالسَّمَاءِ ذَاتِ الرَّجْعِ ﴿١١﴾ وَالْأَرْضِ ذَاتِ الصَّدْعِ ﴿١٢﴾

(86:11-12) ***By the heaven possessed of resurgence! By the earth possessed of splitting!***

Here are two oaths, meant to emphasize the truth of the resurrection and the return to God. The heaven is resurgent in the sense of the apparent sequence of the rising and setting of the stars in cycles. Another suggested interpretation is the cycles of rainfall. The cleaving or furrowing of the earth refers to how it splits apart when plants grow. The connection between these two oaths and the message they emphasize—that is, the people returning to life after death, and emerging from the graves—should be clear.

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلٌ فَصْلٌ ﴿١٣﴾ وَمَا هُوَ بِالْهَزْلِ ﴿١٤﴾

(86:13-14) *It is indeed a decisive* (faṣl) *word, and it is not a jest* (bil-hazl).

These two verses are the main clause of the oaths in the last two verses [86:11-12]. The pronoun "It" refers to the Qur'an. *Faṣl* means "distinguishing one thing from another such that there is a gap between them."[1] *Hazl* (humor, frivolity) is the antonym of *jidd* (serious, earnest).

The meaning is: "I swear by the heaven and the earth that the Qur'an is a speech which distinguishes truth from falsehood. It is not a frivolous speech. Thus, whatever it affirms is the truth without any doubt, and whatever it refutes is falsehood. Hence, what it says about the resurrection and the return is the truth, without any doubt."

Some have suggested that the pronoun "It" refers to the aforementioned return and resurrection. However, the previous interpretation is more plausible.

إِنَّهُمْ يَكِيدُونَ كَيْدًا ﴿١٥﴾ وَأَكِيدُ كَيْدًا ﴿١٦﴾

(86:15-16) *Indeed they are devising a plot, and I [too] am devising a plot.*

That is: "They plot to extinguish the light of God and render your call fruitless through their disbelief and denial of the hereafter. However, their very plots are My plot against them. I draw them step by step into perdition by giving them respite so they can dig their graves deeper. I allow them to throw themselves fully into misguidance by sealing their hearts and casting a veil over their hearing and sight. This is My scheme, which will bring eternal punishment down upon them."

فَمَهِّلِ الْكَافِرِينَ أَمْهِلْهُمْ رُوَيْدًا ﴿١٧﴾

(86:17) *So respite* (fa-mahhil, from tamhīl) *the faithless—respite them* (amhilhum, from imhāl) *a little* (ruwayda).

The two verb forms *tamhīl* and *imhāl* are synonymous (granting respite,

1 What is meant here is *fāṣil* as an active participial noun (*ism al-fāʿil*). However, the verse uses a *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund) for emphasis. This is like saying "Zayd is justice" [instead of "Zayd is just"]. (Auth.)

delaying, postponing). The difference is that the former is a gradual act, whereas the latter is a sudden occurrence and connotes a single action. *Ruwayd* means "a little, awhile."[1] The meaning is: "They have a plot, and I have a plot against them, which is their own plot. *And Allah has [full] command of His affairs* (12:21). Therefore, be patient with them, and do not rush them. Be patient with them a little, for what has been promised to them will soon come to pass. After all, anything that is bound to come is [practically] near."[2]

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning *There is no soul except that there is a guardian over it* (86:4) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: These are the angels.

(2) Concerning *He was created from an effusing fluid* (86:6) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: That is the sperm which vigorously gushes forth.

(3) Concerning *which issues from between the loins and the ribs* (al-tarāʾib) (86:7) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: That is the loins of the man and the *tarāʾib* of the woman, where *tarāʾib* refers to her chest.

Author's comment: Since the narration does not name the Imam (*muḍmar*) and has no chain of transmission (*mursal*), it is not free from problems.

(4) Concerning *on the day when the secrets are examined* (tublá) (86:9) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: It [*tublá*] means *yukshafu ʿanhā* (are unveiled, are disclosed, are revealed).

(5) The Messenger of God said: God has entrusted four things to His creatures: the ritual prayers (*ṣalāh*), the obligatory poor-rate (*zakāt*), fasting in the month of Ramadan, and the ritual bath after sexual impurity (*ghusl al-janābah*). These are the secrets which God refers to: *on the day when the secrets are examined* (86:9).[3]

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1 There is a clear subtlety in the usage of *a little* for the second verb, which implies immediate occurrence, as opposed to the first verb which implies gradualness. (Auth.)
Apparently the subtlety is that the second verb implies the imminence of their punishment. That is why it is qualified by *a little*: "Just bear with them a little bit; it will not be long before they are seized by God's punishment." (Ed.)

2 This is a famous Prophetic narration and proverb that is reported in several Sunni and Shia sources. See volume 39, p. 235 of the English translation: hadith number 4 under verses 76:23-31. (Ed.)

3 *Majmaʾ al-bayān*, on the authority of Abū al-Dardāʾ, with an unconnected

Author's comment: This narration apparently states some applications of the verse [not its exclusive interpretation], as verified by the next narration.

(6) Muʿādh b. Jabal said: Once I asked the Messenger of God, "What are these secrets by which God will test His servants in the hereafter?" He said: "Your secrets are your deeds, including the prayer, fasting, *zakāt* (poor-rate, prescribed religious tax), ablution (*wuḍūʾ*), ritual bath from sexual impurity, and all religious obligations. This is because all acts are secret and hidden, such that one can say, 'I prayed' or 'I made ablution' while they have not. That is the meaning of the verse: *on the day when the secrets are examined* (86:9)."[1]

(7) Concerning *and he shall have neither power nor helper* (86:10) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: He will have no strength to overthrow his Creator, nor any helper to aid him from God if God wills any ill for him.

(8) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *By the heaven possessed of resurgence* (86:11): [It means] possessed of rain. *By the earth possessed of splitting* (86:12): [It means] possessed of plants.

(9) Concerning *It is indeed a decisive word* (86:13) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: It means that the Qur'an distinguishes between truth and falsehood by clarifying them each.[2]

(10) Al-Ḥārith al-Aʿwar said: Once I entered the mosque, and saw the people plunging in arguments and controversy. Then I went to see ʿAlī, and told him about it. He said: "So have they done it [finally]? I heard the Messenger of God say: 'There shall certainly be a *fitnah* (ordeal, tribulation, discord).'

'What will be the way out of it, O Messenger of God?' I inquired. 'The Book of God, He replied. 'In it are reports of those before you, the news of those after you, and the ruling among you. It is *a decisive word, and it is not a jest* (86:13-14). God shall destroy any tyrant who abandons it, and shall lead astray anyone who prefers to pursue their own desires away from it. It is the strong rope of God, *the robust reminder* (3:58), and *the straight path* (1:6). It is not

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chain of transmission (*marfūʿ*).

1 *Majmaʾ al-bayān*.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

overridden by whims and desires. The scholar will never be satiated from it. It shall not be lost in translation. It does not become outdated due to denial and rejection. Its wonders never cease. When the jinn heard it, they did not leave without saying: *Indeed we heard a wonderful recitation, which leads to guidance* (72:1-2). Whoever speaks with it, speaks the truth. Whoever judges by it, judges justly. Whoever acts by it, will be rewarded. And whoever is called to it, is guided to the straight path.'"[1]

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Shaybah, al-Dārimī, al-Tirmidhī, Muḥammad b. Naṣr and Ibn al-Anbarī's *al-maṣāḥif*. The same book has also reported a similar narration from the Prophet on the authority of Muʿādh b. Jabal, and a shorter version of it from ʿAlī, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh.

Chapter 87

al-Aʿlá (The Most High)

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Verses 1-19

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful.

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 19 verses. It commands the audience to hold God's unity as it befits His sacred precinct. One must glorify the sublime essence of the divine by not invoking the name of any other being beside His. One should also not ascribe to others what must be ascribed to God, such as the creation of beings, the direction of their affairs, and the provision of their sustenance. God promises the Prophet to support him with knowledge and a retention, and to pave the path for him where he can propagate and preach his message most conveniently and appropriately.

The context of the opening verses matches Meccan verses. However, according to narrations from the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt, as well as Sunni accounts, the verse *Delivered is one who purifies oneself* (87:13) pertains to the *zakāt* and prayer of Eid al-Fiṭr. Since fasting—and the *zakāt* and Eid Prayer which are a sequel to that—were legislated in Medina after the Prophet's migration, it follows that the last part of the chapter [verses 87:14-19] were revealed in Medina. Therefore, the beginning of the chapter is Meccan, while its end is Medinan. This does not contradict the narrations which include the chapter under the Meccan chapters, because those accounts can be interpreted as referring to the sūrah's beginning.

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سَبِّحِ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَى ﴿١﴾

(87:1) ***Glorify the name of your Lord, the Most Sublime*** **(al-Aʿlá),**

This verse orders the audience to proclaim the sanctity, incomparability, and transcendence of God's name. *Name* is a word that signifies an object (the named), and is specifically something that is expressed verbally.

The verse's command—*Glorify the name of your Lord*—can be elaborated as follows: (1) Along with God's name, one should not invoke the name of any other being that is not befitting of the divine precinct, such as the gods, partners and intercessors that the polytheists believed in. (2) One should not ascribe lordship to them. (3) One should not ascribe to others the qualities that exclusively belong to God, such as creation, existentiation, provision, giving life and causing death. (4) One should not ascribe to God any imperfection or shortcoming in action or quality, such as weakness, ignorance, injustice and negligence. None of this suit His sanctity.

This is the meaning of *tanzīh* (glorification, proclaiming God's transcendence, deeming God incomparable): To refine, filter and abstract one's speech from anything not befitting the name and mention of God. That is a verbal glorification of God, which is consonant with practical glorification. It is also part and parcel of complete monotheism, which requires negating explicit polytheism, as reflected in these verses: *When Allah is mentioned alone, [thereat] shrink away the hearts of those who do not believe in the hereafter, but when others are mentioned besides Him, behold, they rejoice* (39:45); *When you mention your Lord alone in the Qur'an, they turn their backs in aversion* (17:46).

… of your Lord…: The words *your* and *Lord* confirm what we said above. The meaning is: "Glorify the name of that Being Whom you have adopted as your Lord, Whom you claim to be a Lord Who must be worshiped. Thus, when you mention the name of your Lord, you must not make mention of anything else that would contravene His quality of Lordship as He has made it known to you."

Aʿlá means "the highest of the high who dominates everything." It is an adjective for *your Lord*, not for *name*, and serves as a justification for the verse's command. That is: "Glorify His name *because* He is the Most Sublime."

Here are some views suggested by the exegetes:

(1) The verse means: "Say, *subḥāna Rabbī al-Aʿlá* (glory be to my Lord, the Most Sublime)." This is narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās.

(2) The verse means: "Pray!" This is also narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās.

(3) What is meant by *ism* (name) here is *musammá* (the named, the referent). The meaning is: "Hold God clear from any attribute or action that does not befit His sacred precinct."

(4) Though the verse says *name*, what is meant is to glorify the named object. This can be confirmed by Labīd's words: "Up to a year, then

the name of farewell to you two."[1] The meaning is: "Glorify your Lord, the Most Sublime."

(5) What is meant is glorifying the divine names, which could have different applications, such as: (i) Not to divert a name from its original meaning as long as it is not necessary [theologically]. (ii) Not to adhere to the original meaning of a name if it cannot be correctly applied to God. (iii) Not to apply a name to others if it exclusively belongs to God, such as the name Allah. (iv) Not to utter His names in an unsuitable setting such as the rest room.

Comment: Our interpretation above is more comprehensive than these suggested views, and is inclusive of them. It is also more concordant with the context of the verses below: *We shall have you recite, then you will not forget [any of it]… And We shall ease you into the easier. So admonish…* (87:6-9). The theme of the chapter is arousing the Prophet to admonish and preach to the people. This theme is pursued in several stages: (1) First he must rectify his own speech and cleanse it from any expression of explicit or implicit polytheism. That is the meaning of glorifying the name of his Lord [in the current verse]. (2) Then he is promised that he will be made to recite what has been revealed to him without forgetting anything [87:6]. (3) Next, he is assured that the way of preaching will be smoothened for him [87:8]. (4) Finally, he is commanded to admonish and preach to the people [87:8]. The reader should reflect on this.

الَّذِی خَلَقَ فَسَوَّی ۝٢

(87:2) *Who created* (khalaqa, from khalq) *and proportioned* (fa-sawwá, from taswiyah),

These four verses [87:2-5] describe *your Lord* (87:1) and prove His absolute Lordship. *Khalq* means "assembling the parts of something." *Taswiyah* means "proportioning, balancing, normalizing." That is, placing every constituent of something where it belongs, such as placing every human organ in its appropriate place in the body. Notwithstanding their unqualified usage in this verse, creation and proportioning are only applicable to

1 In this hemistich, the word "name" is semantically empty. It effectively means: "Up to a year, then farewell to you two." This is part of a poem where Labīd (d. c. 561) asks his two daughters to mourn for him moderately up to a year after his death. See al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-ʿarūs*, under *ʿ-dh-r*. (Ed.)

those parts of God's creation that are composite in one way or another.

وَ الَّذِی قَدَّرَ فَهَدٰی ﴿۳﴾

(87:3) ***Who measured and guided,***

God has designed His creation according to specific measures and precise limits which pervade their entire beings, attributes and functions. Furthermore, He has equipped them with the necessary faculties that are harmonious with the functions and perfections that He has ordained for them. That is His guidance of them. Accordingly, every creature pursues what God has determined for it through its Lord's guidance. For instance, an infant finds its way to its mother's breast; a fledgling finds its way to its parents' beaks; the male goes after the female; and any creature seeks its interest. God says: *There is not a thing but that its sources are with Us, and We do not send it down except in a known measure* (15:21); *Then He made the way easy for him* (80:20); *Everyone has a cynosure to which he turns* (2:148).

وَ الَّذِی أَخْرَجَ الْمَرْعٰی ﴿۴﴾

(87:4) ***Who brought forth the pasture*** **(al-marʿá),**

Marʿá is that on which animals graze (*tarʿá*). It is *brought forth* by God, which means that He makes the plants grow.

فَجَعَلَهُ غُثَاءً أَحْوٰی ﴿۵﴾

(87:5) ***then turned it into a black*** **(aḥwá)** ***scum*** **(ghuthāʾan).**

Ghuthāʾ is what flood deposits on the side of a valley, such as herbs and twigs. According to some exegetes, what is meant here is withered plants. *Aḥwá* means "black." Bringing forth pastures to feed the animals [87:4], and then turning that into black scum [87:5] are instances of God's direction of affairs as a Lord. In this sense, they are like His creation and proportioning [87:2], and His measurement and guidance [87:3].

سَنُقْرِئُكَ فَلَا تَنْسٰی ﴿۶﴾

(87:6) ***We shall have you recite*** **(sa-nuqriʾuka, from iqrāʾ),** ***then you will not forget*** **[any of it]**

Al-Mufradāt says:

> *Qirāʾah* means putting the letters together and combining the words in recitation. It is not applicable for uttering a single letter. Likewise, it is not used for any kind of gathering and combination. For instance, when one assembles a group of people one would not use the verb *qaraʾtu*.

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> *Iqrāʾ* means picking the recitation of a reciter by listening to them in order to correct their slips. The word *qāriʾ* [or *qārī*] is synonymous with *tālī* (reciter, reader).

In this verse, God is the subject of *iqrāʾ*, and the Prophet is its object. What is meant here is not what we commonly do amongst ourselves, where someone listens to a reciter and point out where they make a mistake or do not pronounce well. There is no historical record saying that the Prophet ever recited anything of the Qur'an incorrectly or with a bad pronunciation, or that he forgot the revelation and then corrected it later. What is meant here is that God fortifies the Prophet to recite the Qur'an as it was revealed, without modifying it through addition, subtraction, or any distortion due to forgetting.

Hence, the verse is a promise from God to His Prophet, assuring him that God will enable him to learn the Qur'an and retain it as it is revealed without forgetting. This way, the Prophet would certainly recite the Qur'an [to the people] as it was revealed, which insures the delivery of the message as God revealed to him.

إِلاَّ ما شاءَ اللَّهُ إِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ الْجَهْرَ وَ ما يَخْفى ۝٧

(87:7) *except what Allah may will. Indeed He knows the overt and what is hidden.*

This exception shows that God's absolute power is not curtailed by anything. The last verse was a blessing upon the Prophet, assuring him that he shall be made to recite without forgetting. The current verse clarifies that this blessing is not cut off from God in a way. In other words, God remains omnipotent as before, and can make the Prophet forget whenever He wills, even though He does not will so. In this sense, the exception in this verse is similar to the exception in the verse: *As for the felicitous, they will be in paradise. They will remain in it for as long as the heavens and the earth endure—except what your Lord may will—an endless bounty* (11:108). We

explained the significance of this exception in our exposition of the verse.[1]

The exception is not intended to *exclude* certain instances of forgetting from a general state of not forgetting. In that case, the meaning would have been: "We shall have you recite without forgetting anything except those things which God wants you to forget." This is not a plausible interpretation because it is applicable to everyone in general: Every person remembers certain things and forgets others. There is nothing special with such a state to be given to the Prophet with a tone of favor, because he would already have that quality like everybody else. Hence, the purport of the verse is what we said initially.

There is another suggested view which can be confirmed with the theme of the verse: When the Prophet received revelation from Gabriel, he would start reciting the Qur'an, fearing that he may forget it. He would begin reciting before Gabriel finished imparting the entire message. But once these verses [87:6-7] were revealed, there was no longer any fear of him forgetting anything.

It can be argued that the verses in this regard were revealed in the following order: First, *We shall have you recite, then you will not forget [any of it]* (87:6). Second, *Do not move your tongue with it to hasten it. Indeed its collection and its recitation are upon Us. And when We have recited it, follow its recitation. Then, its exposition is [also] upon Us* (75:16-19). Third, *Do not hasten with the Qur'an before its revelation is completed for you, and say, "My Lord! Increase me in knowledge"* (20:114).[2]

… Indeed He knows the overt* (al-jahr) *and what is hidden: This sentence is a justification for the last verse: *We shall have you recite, then you will not forget [any of it]* (87:6). The meaning is: "We shall take care of what concerns you with regards to receiving and retaining the revelation *because* indeed We know the outside and inside of all things. Thus We know the manifest and hidden aspects of your state of being, including your concern about revelation and your commitment to obey your Lord."

Jahr means "perfect perceptibility of something" through either sight or hearing, as reflected in these verses: *Show us Allah visibly* (jahrah) (4:153);

1 This is a rare type of exception which serves to emphasize, not limit, the statement. It means: "No one in the world can effect change in this regard except God, and He has decreed that you shall not forget." (Ed.)

2 See volume 27, p. 302 of the English translation, under verse 20:114; and volume 39, pp. 175-176, under verse 75:16. (Ed.)

Indeed He knows whatever is spoken aloud (al-jahr) (21:110). However, what is meant here is anything that is readily and evidently perceivable in general, though it may not be through either sight or hearing. This can be inferred from its contrast with *what is hidden*.

There is a transition from the first person plural in the last verse to the third person singular in this verse: *except what Allah may will*. The purpose of this transition is to substantiate the exception mentioned here. That is, giving knowledge and retention to the Prophet does not strip God off the power to do otherwise *because* He is *Allah*, meaning a being that encompasses all qualities of perfection, including omnipotence. The next part of the verse—*Indeed He knows…*—follows the same third person singular for the same reason.

وَ نُيَسِّرُكَ لِلْيُسْرٰى ﴿٨﴾

(87:8) *And We shall ease you* (niyassiruka, from taysīr) *into the easier* (lil-yusrá).

Taysīr is synonymous with *tashīl* (facilitating, making easy).[1] The meaning is: "We will take care of you in such a way that you will always have the smoothest path in making your call and propagating your message, both verbally and practically. Thus, you will be able to guide some people, complete the argument against others, and withstand their harassments in the easiest way."

The natural way of expression here would have been: "We shall make the easier easy for you" (*wa nuyassiru laka al-yusrá*), much like the verse [where Prophet Moses prays]: *Make my affair easy for me* (20:26). However, the verse is phrased differently—as *And We shall ease you into the easier*—because the focus here is preparing and fortifying the Prophet's soul in a way that he is capable of delivering his mission and propagating the message. Moreover, it would have been somewhat tautological to say, "We shall make the easier easy for you."

This amounts to making the Prophet strongly rooted in his *fiṭrah* (primal nature, innate disposition, pristine conscience), because the easiest path is the path of *fiṭrah*. Hence, the verse is comparable to what is

1 *Yusrá* is the feminine form of *aysar* (easier, easiest). What is meant here is "the easier way," where the noun "way" is omitted and replaced by its adjective *yusrá* (easier, easiest). (Auth.)

narrated elsewhere from Moses: *It behooves me to not ascribe anything to Allah except the truth* (7:105).

فَذَكِّرْ إِنْ نَفَعَتِ الذِّكْرَى ﴿٩﴾

(87:9) *So admonish, if* (in) *there is benefit in admonition.*

The previous verses guaranteed the necessary conditions for the success of the religious message, including: (1) commanding the Prophet to glorify God's name [87:1]; (2) promising him that he will be made to recite the revelation without forgetting [87:6]; (3) assuring him that he will be smoothened into the easiest way [87:8]. Then this verse follows as a consequence and conclusion, which is indicated by the letter *fā'* (so, therefore, then) at the beginning of the verse. The meaning is: "Now that you have all of the required conditions—namely, you obeying Our command, We making you recite without forgetting, and We making things easy for you—*So admonish, if there is benefit in admonition*."

The command to admonish is qualified by: *if there is benefit in admonition*. This should be understood in the most apparent sense of a conditional statement. It would be in vain to admonish when there is no benefit in doing so, and God is clear of commanding a vain act. Hence, the verse can be analyzed into three commands and one prohibition: (i) Give initial admonition to those who fear [their Lord], because their hearts would incline toward the truth, and that is beneficial to them. (ii) Give subsequent reminders to the same people because they will continue to benefit: *He who fears [God] will take admonition* (87:10). (iii) Give initial admonition to the wretched who have no fear [of God] in their heart. The benefit of this first admonition is to complete God's argument against them as they reject and turn away from the truth: *And the most wretched will shun it* (87:11). (iv) Do not bother with subsequent reminders to them, because there is no benefit in that. Indeed God orders His Messenger to turn away from such people [after the initial admonition]: *So avoid those who turn away from Our remembrance and desire nothing but the life of the world* (53:29).

Here are some other suggested views on the verse:

(1) While the verse is expressed as a conditional statement, it does not imply a condition. Rather, what is meant is to assert that admonition will certainly be beneficial in one way or another, because it will either induce the audience to be more obedient, or be less disobedient. This is similar to saying, "Ask him, for asking

is beneficial." Accordingly, some exegetes have interpreted the Arabic particle *in* (if) as *qad* (certainly, indeed, for).[1] Others have interpreted it as *idh* (because, since).[2]

Comment: The problem with these interpretations is that there are some cases when there is no more argument to be made. It is not true that admonition is always beneficial. God says: *As for the faithless, it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them, they will not have faith. Allah has set a seal on their hearts and their hearing, and there is a blindfold on their sight* (2:6-7).

(2) The verse involves an omission for brevity. The implied meaning is: "So admonish, whether there is benefit in admonition or not." This is because the entire mission of the Prophet was to admonish the people and leave them with no excuse. Hence, it was incumbent on him to remind them, regardless of the reminder being beneficial or not. In this sense, the verse can be compared with the verse: *and made for you garments that protect you from heat* (16:81), where "and cold" is also implied though not mentioned explicitly.

Comment: We do not agree that it was incumbent on the Prophet to admonish the people even in cases when it had no effect.

(3) The conditional clause is meant as an expression of regret, saying how unlikely it is that such an audience would benefit from the admonition.[3] It is as though the verse is saying: Do what you are commanded for its reward, even though they may not benefit from it."

Comment: This interpretation is rejected by the next verse: *He who fears [God] will take admonition* (87:10).

سَيَذَّكَّرُ مَنْ يَخْشَى ﴿١٠﴾

(87:10) *He who fears [God] will take admonition.*

Anyone in whose heart has any fear of God and His punishment will be awakened and admonished with the Qur'an.

1 The meaning would be: "Admonish them; indeed admonition is beneficial." (Ed.)

2 The meaning would be: "Admonish them since admonition is beneficial." (Ed.)

3 The meaning would be: "Admonish them—only if they would benefit from admonition." (Ed.)

وَ يَتَجَنَّبُهَا الْأَشْقَى ﴿١١﴾

(87:11) *And the most wretched will shun it* (yatajannabuhā, from tajannub)

The antecedent of the pronoun "it" is *admonition* (87:9). Given the verse's contrast with the last verse, *the most wretched* is someone who has no fear of God in their heart. *Tajannub* is synonymous with *tabāʿud* (to distance oneself from something). The meaning is: "Those who do not fear God will turn away from the admonition."

الَّذِي يَصْلَى النَّارَ الْكُبْرَى ﴿١٢﴾

(87:12) *—he who will enter the greatest fire,*

Apparently *the greatest fire* refers to hellfire, which is greater than any the fires of this world. Some have interpreted it as the lowest levels of hell, where the punishment is most intense.

ثُمَّ لا يَمُوتُ فِيها وَ لا يَحْيى ﴿١٣﴾

(87:13) *then* (thumma) *he will neither live in it, nor die.*

The word *thumma* (then) marks the different parts of speech [not a temporal gap].[1] Negating life and death means negating any deliverance forever. Deliverance—that is, termination of punishment—would occur through either of two ways: (1) through death, where one would no longer suffer as they no longer exist; (2) through a transformation of their mode of living from that of wretchedness to that of happiness, from torment to comfort. Accordingly, what is meant here by "life" is *happy* life, as they sometimes say concerning a patient: "He is neither alive to be hopeful about, nor dead to be forgotten."

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ تَزَكَّى ﴿١٤﴾

(87:14) *Delivered is one who purifies oneself* (tazakká, from tazakkī),

Tazakkī means "self-purification." This can have a number of

1 *Thumma* in such cases can be interpreted as "in addition, besides." (Ed.)

applications: (1) Purifying oneself from defiling worldly attachments, which distract one from the hereafter. This can be inferred from what we read below: *Yet you prefer the life of this world* (87:16). (2) Returning to God, which cleanses one from clinging to the earth. (3) Spending in God's way, which purges one from the impurities of financial attachments. (4) Making ablution (*wuḍūʾ*) for the prayer, which is a symbolic way of purifying oneself from what one has acquired with one's face, hands and feet.

وَ ذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّى ﴿١٥﴾

(87:15) ***and remembers the name of his Lord, and prays.***

Apparently what is meant by "remembering" here is verbal invocation, and what is meant by "prayer" is the specific daily Islamic ritual. These two verses [87:14-15] have a general meaning in terms of their text. However, there are narrations from the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt, saying that they pertain to the *zakāt* and prayer on Eid al-Fiṭr. There are also Sunni narrations to this effect.

بَلْ تُؤْثِرُونَ الْحَياةَ الدُّنْيا ﴿١٦﴾

(87:16) ***Yet you prefer*** **(tuʾthirūna, from īthār)** ***the life of this world,***

Īthār means "choosing, preferring." This verse makes a transition to address all people in the light of the general human disposition to be attached to their life in this world and be occupied with its betterment. Some have said that the verse is addressed to the disbelievers in particular. Either way, the verse involves a tone of rebuke, and the shift to the second person is meant to underline this.

وَ الْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ وَ أَبْقى ﴿١٧﴾

(87:17) ***while the hereafter is better and more lasting.***

The hereafter is not only *more lasting*, but it is everlasting. However, the context of these verses is a comparison between this world and the next. As such, it suffices to note that the hereafter is better and more lasting compared to this life, and should thus be preferred.

إِنَّ هذا لَفِي الصُّحُفِ الْأُولى ﴿١٨﴾ صُحُفِ إِبْراهِيمَ وَ مُوسى ﴿١٩﴾

(87:18-19) ***This is indeed in the former scriptures: the scriptures of***

Abraham and Moses.

The demonstrative pronoun "This" refers to what was mention in the last four verses [87:14-17]. Some have said that it specifically refers to the last verse: *while the hereafter is better and more lasting* (87:17). The first verse makes a vague reference to *the former scriptures*, which is then interpreted in the second verse as *the scriptures of Abraham and Moses*. This way of expression, as some exegetes have noted, conveys a clear veneration and glorification of these scriptures.

Examining Narrations

(1) When the verse, *So glorify the name of your Lord, the Ever-Magnificent* (56:74, 56:96, 69:52) was revealed, the Messenger of God said, "Set it in your *rukūʿ* (bowing)." When the verse *Glorify the name of your Lord, the Most Sublime* (87:1) was revealed, he said, "Set it in your *sujūd* (prostration)."[1]

(2) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *Glorify the name of your Lord, the Most Sublime* (87:1): [It means] say, "Glory be to my Lord, the Most Sublime" (*subḥāna Rabbī al-Aʿlá*)." *Who created and proportioned, Who measured and guided* (87:2-3): He has measured things through an initial determination, then He guides to that whomever He wills. *Who brought forth the pasture* (87:4): It means plants. *Then turned it into a black scum* (87:5): Once it grows to maturity, it withers and blackens.

(3) The Prophet used to invoke the Qur'an [repeatedly, when it was being revealed], fearing that he may forget it. Then he was told, "We shall take care of that for you," and it was revealed: *We shall have you recite [the Qur'an], then you will not forget [any of it]* (87:6).[2]

(4) Once Imam al-Ṣādiq was inquired about the verse: *Delivered is one who purifies oneself* (87:14). He said, "That is one who sets aside *zakāt al-Fiṭr*." He was asked about *and remembers the name of his*

1 *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, on the authority of ʿUqbat b. ʿĀmir al-Juhanī. This is also narrated from the Prophet in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Mājah, Ibn al-Mundhir and Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of ʿUqbah.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās.

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Lord, and prays (87:15). He explained: "One who goes to the field[1] for the prayer [of the Eid]."[2]

(5) The Messenger of God used to recite: *Delivered is one who purifies oneself, and remembers the name of his Lord, and prays* (87:14-15). Then he would distribute *zakāt al-Fiṭr* before going out in the morning of Eid al-Fiṭr to pray.[3]

(6) Abū Dharr said: Once I asked, "O Messenger of God! Has God revealed anything to you about this world which was in the scriptures of Abraham and Moses?"

"O Abā Dharr," he said, "recite: *Delivered is one who purifies oneself, and remembers the name of his Lord, and prays. Yet you prefer the life of this world, while the hereafter is better and more lasting. This is indeed in the former scriptures: the scriptures of Abraham and Moses* (87:14-19)."[4]

Author's comment: This hadith confirms our view that the demonstrative pronoun "This" [in verse 87:18] refers to all four verses preceding it [87:14-17].

(7) Abū Baṣīr said: Imam al-Ṣādiq said, "The scriptures that God has mentioned—*the scriptures of Abraham and Moses* (87:19)—are

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1 Given the size of the crowd, it was common to hold the Eid prayers outdoors. (Ed.)

2 *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*. This idea is also narrated from the Imam in the same book, on the authority of Ḥammād, on the authority of Ḥarīz, on the authority of Abū Baṣīr and Zurārah. It is also mentioned in *Tafsīr al-Qummī* without naming the Imam (*muḍmar*) and without a chain of narration (*mursal*).

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī. Here is a list of further accounts [in *al-Durr al-manthūr*] which convey the same idea—that the verses were revealed with reference to the *zakāt* and prayer of Eid al-Fiṭr: (1) From Abū Saʿīd, through two chains of narration, without connecting to the Prophet (*mawqūf*). (2) From Ibn ʿUmar, through two chains of narration. (3) From Nāʾilat b. al-Aṣqaʿ, through one chain of narration. (4) From Abū al-ʿĀliyah, through two chains of narration. (5) From ʿAṭāʾ, through one chain of narration. (6) From Muḥammad b. Sīrīn, through one chain of narration. (7) From Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī, through one chain of narration. (8) From the Prophet, on the authority of ʿAmr b. ʿAwf.

4 *Al-Khiṣāl*, on the authority of ʿUtbah b. ʿAmr al-Laythī, as a part of a longer hadith.

with us [Ahl al-Bayt]." I asked, "Are these scriptures in the form of tablets?" "Yes," he replied.[1]

Author's comment: Apparently identifying the scriptures as tablets (*alwāḥ*) is a way of matching them with the Torah, which is described as tablets in a few places in the Qur'an: *And We wrote for him in the Tablets from all things* (7:145); *He threw down the Tablets* (7:150); *he picked up the Tablets* (7:154).

(8) Abū Dharr said: Once I asked the Prophet, "O Messenger of God! How many prophets have there been?"
"124,000."
"How many of them were messengers (sing. *rasūl*, *mursal*)]?"
"313. The rest of them were prophets (sing. *nabī*)."
"Was Adam a prophet?"
"Indeed. He was God's word, whom He created with His own hand." O Abā Dharr! Four of the prophets were Arabs: Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Shuʿayb, and your prophet."
"O Messenger of God! How many scriptures has God revealed?"
"114 scriptures. Of them, He revealed 10 scriptures to Adam; 50 to Seth (Shayth); 30 to Akhnūkh (Enoch), which is the same as Idrīs, who was the first person to write with a pen; and 10 to Abraham. Then He revealed the Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms (Zabūr) and the Furqān (Qur'an).[2]

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1 *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, via two chains of narration.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*. The same account is narrated from Abū Dharr in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, Ibn Mardawayh and Ibn ʿAsākir, with the difference that it does not mention Adam's scriptures, but mentions 10 scriptures revealed to Moses before the Torah.

Chapter 88

al-Ghāshiyah (The Enveloper)

Verses 1-26

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful.

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 26 verses. It comprises of warning and glad tidings. It names the Day of Resurrection *al-ghāshiyah* (the enveloper, the overwhelming event) since it shall encompass all people. It describes the day according to the condition of the people on that day. They will be divided into two groups: the happy and the wretched, who will abide, respectively, in the garden and the fire that has been prepared for them. At the end, the chapter commands the Prophet to admonish the people by turning their attention to various ways by which God directs the affairs of the world, which prove Him to be the Lord. The Prophet is also ordered to remind the people about their return to God and the reckoning of their deeds. The theme of the chapter's verses testify to its being revealed in Mecca.

هَلْ أَتاكَ حَدِيثُ الْغاشِيَةِ ﴿١﴾

(88:1) ***Did you receive the account of the Enveloper*** **(al-ghāshiyah)*?***

The question in this verse indicates glorification and aggrandizement. *The Enveloper* is the Day of Resurrection. There are three possible explanations for this appellation: (1) That day will encompass and cover (*taghshá*) all people, as God says: *We shall muster them, and We will not leave out anyone of them* (18:47). (2) It will cover (*taghshá*) the people with its terrors, as suggested by some exegetes. (3) It will cover (*taghshá*) the faces of disbelievers with punishment.

وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ خاشِعَةٌ ﴿٢﴾

(88:2) ***Some faces on that day will be humbled,***

They will be humbled by the sorrow and punishment that will cover them. Humility will be the quality of the people, but it is ascribed to their *faces* because its signs appear on the face most visibly.

عامِلَةٌ ناصِبَةٌ ﴿٣﴾

(88:3) *labored and weary* (nāṣibah, from naṣab):

Naṣab is synonymous with *taʿab* (exhaustion, fatigue). The two qualities mentioned in this verse—*labored and weary*—and the three qualities in the next three verses—*Entering* (88:4), *Drinking* (88:5), *They will have* (88:6)—are further predicates for *Some faces* (88:2). Given the verse's contrast with what is mentioned below concerning the inhabitants of paradise—*Pleased with their striving* (88:9)—what is meant by "labor" is their efforts in the world, and what is meant by "weariness" is the result of that in the hereafter. One would toil and strive in this world in order to reach a goal and find rest at the end. However, the efforts of these people will be cancelled and will not prove beneficial to them, as God says: *Then We shall attend to the works they have done and then turn them into scattered dust* (25:23). Hence, what remains for them of their labor is only exhaustion and weariness. This is contrary to the dwellers of paradise, who will be pleased with their efforts in this life because their works will be their ticket to comfort in paradise.

Two other suggested meanings are:

(1) They will labor in the fire and get exhausted therein, for they will be experiencing a variety of punishments that will torment and tire them.

(2) They labored in this world by committing sins, and will be weary in the fire on the Day of Resurrection.

تَصْلى ناراً حامِيَةً ﴿٤﴾

(88:4) *Entering a scorching fire.*

They will be bound to a fire at the utmost degree of heat.

تُسْقى مِنْ عَيْنٍ آنِيَةٍ ﴿٥﴾

(88:5) *Drinking from a boiling* (āniyah) *spring.*

Āniyah means "extremely hot, searing."

لَيْسَ لَهُمْ طَعامٌ إِلاَّ مِنْ ضَرِيعٍ ۝٦ لا يُسْمِنُ وَ لا يُغْنِي مِنْ جُوعٍ ۝٧

(88:6-7) ***They will have no food except cactus*** **(ḍarīᶜ)*****, neither nourishing, nor availing against hunger.***

It is said that *ḍarīᶜ* is a kind of thornbush which is also known as *shabraq*. People of Hejaz call it *ḍarīᶜ* when it dries. It is the most unpleasant, the most repelling and the coarsest plant, on which no animal feeds. Perhaps it is mentioned here to designate what is in hell only based on their similarity in form and properties.

وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ ناعِمَةٌ ۝٨

(88:8) ***Some faces on that day will be joyous*** **(nāᶜimah)*:***

There are two possible interpretations for *nāᶜimah*: (1) It is derived from *nuᶜūmah* (softness, fineness), used metaphorically for a kind of joy and happiness that shows itself on one's physical appearance. This would make the verse comparable to: *You will perceive in their faces the resplendence of bliss* (83:24). (2) It is derived from *niᶜmah* (blessing, bounty, boon), where it means "endowed with bounties, granted blessings."

There is no conjunction "and" at the beginning of this verse to connect it to the verse: *Some faces on that day will be humbled* (88:2). According to some, this is to show that there will be a wide gap between the two groups.

لِسَعْيِها راضِيَةٌ ۝٩

(88:9) ***Pleased with their striving*** **(li-saᶜyihā),**

What is meant by *saᶜy* (effort, endeavor) is their striving to perform righteous deeds in this world.[1] The meaning is: "They will be pleased with their effort, meaning their righteous deeds, because they will receive a good reward for them."

فِي جَنَّةٍ عالِيَةٍ ۝١٠

(88:10) ***in a lofty paradise,***

It is lofty in terms of its rank, honor, magnificence and lushness.

1 The letter *lām* in this verse is *zāʾidah* (extra, supplementary, semantically empty), added for emphasis. (Auth.)

Therein will be life that is not accompanied with death, pleasure that is not mixed with pain, and joy that is not coupled with sorrow. They will have therein whatever they wish.

لا تَسْمَعُ فِيها لاغِيَةً ﴿١١﴾

(88:11) ***wherein they will not hear any vain talk.***

The above mentioned faces [88:8] will not hear any idle, futile or inappropriate speech.

فِيها عَيْنٌ جارِيَةٌ ﴿١٢﴾

(88:12) ***In it there is a flowing spring***

Spring is meant here in its generic sense. Otherwise, God has named multiple springs in His Book, such as *Salsabīl* (76:18), *a purifying drink* (76:21) and so on.[1]

فِيها سُرُرٌ مَرْفُوعَةٌ ﴿١٣﴾

(88:13) ***and in it there are raised couches*** **(surur),**

Surur is the plural of *sarīr* (couch, bed, throne). The height of these couches indicates the exalted rank of those reclining on them.

وَ أَكْوابٌ مَوْضُوعَةٌ ﴿١٤﴾

(88:14) ***and goblets*** **(akwāb)** ***set,***

Akwāb is the plural of *kūb*, which is "a drinking vessel without a handle or a spout."

وَ نَمارِقُ مَصْفُوفَةٌ ﴿١٥﴾

(88:15) ***and cushions*** **(namāriq)** ***laid out in an array,***

Namāriq is the plural of *namriqah*, which means "cushion, pillow, bolster." They are *laid out in an array*, evoking luxurious halls in this world where cushions are laid across, connected to one another.

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1 *A purifying drink* (76:21) is not mentioned as a spring in paradise. It could have another source. For heavenly springs, see verses 15:45, 44:52, 51:15, 55:50, 55:66, 76:5-6, 76:17-18, 77:41, 83:27-28. (Ed.)

وَ زَرابِيُّ مَبْثُوثَةٌ ﴿١٦﴾

(88:16) ***and carpets*** **(zarābī)** ***spread out.***

Zarābī means "elegant rugs."[1] They are rolled out to be sat on.

أَ فَلا يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَى الْإِبِلِ كَيْفَ خُلِقَتْ ﴿١٧﴾

(88:17) ***Do they not observe the camel, [to see] how she has been created?***

Having depicted *the Enveloper* (88:1) and the state of the believers and disbelievers on that day, the chapter proceeds with a concise reminder of God's direction and management of the world. This proves His Lordship, which in turn makes His worship incumbent on His servants. And a necessary requirement of that is that there must be a reckoning of deeds, where the believers are rewarded for their belief, and the disbelievers are punished for their disbelief. The Enveloper is the time of reckoning and retribution.

This verse urges the audience to reflect on the camel's creation. See how God has transformed lifeless and unconscious dust into such an amazing creature in terms of its organs, faculties and functions. He has further made it subservient to the people so that they may ride it, carry their loads on it, and benefit from its meat, milk, hide, hair, and even its urine and dung. Could all this be mere coincidence, without an intelligent design behind it?

The verse mentions camel specifically because it was revealed in Mecca, where its primary audience were Bedouins, and camels played a pivotal role in their lives.

وَ إِلَى السَّماءِ كَيْفَ رُفِعَتْ ﴿١٨﴾

(88:18) ***and the sky, how it has been raised?***

The sky has been adorned by luminous bodies such as the sun, the moon and the stars, all of which benefit the inhabitants of the earth. And beneath it is the atmosphere, which the animals need for breathing.

وَ إِلَى الْجِبالِ كَيْفَ نُصِبَتْ ﴿١٩﴾

(88:19) ***and the mountains, how they have been set?***

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1 It is the plural of *zurbiyah*, *zarbiyah* and *zirbiyah*. (Auth.)

There are three main benefits in the mountains: (1) They are the earth's stakes which hold it firmly from agitation. (2) They are water storages, from which fountains emerge. (3) They are reserves for minerals.

وَ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ كَيْفَ سُطِحَتْ ﴿٢٠﴾

(88:20) ***and the earth, how it has been surfaced?***

The earth has been extended and leveled in such a way that it is suitable for human inhabitation, easy transportation, and the majority of human activities.

These are some general categories of how the affairs of the world are managed. They are indubitably God's act and design. Hence, He is the Lord of the sky, the earth, and what lies between them. This means that He is also the Lord of the human world. Thus, it is incumbent on them to accept Him as their Lord, subscribe to His absolute oneness, and worship Him alone. It also follows that there is the Enveloper ahead of them, which is the day of reckoning and retribution.

فَذَكِّرْ إِنَّما أَنْتَ مُذَكِّرٌ ﴿٢١﴾

(88:21) ***So admonish—for you are only an admonisher,***

The letter *fā*ʾ (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of this verse shows that this is a conclusion to the previous discussion. The meaning is: "Now that God is their only Lord, and that all of them—both believers and unbelievers—are facing a day of reckoning and retribution, so admonish them about it."

… for you are only an admonisher: This statement shows that, as a messenger, the Prophet's duty is only to admonish and remind, hoping that they will respond and believe. But it is not up to him to impel and coerce them into faith.

لَسْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِمُصَيْطِرٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

(88:22) ***and you are not a taskmaster*** **(muṣayṭir)** ***over them—***

This verse is an interpretation and elaboration of *you are only an admonisher* (88:21). *Muṣayṭir* was originally *musayṭir* [with the letter *sīn*],[1]

1 It is common for the letter *sīn* to be converted to *ṣād* when there is a *ṭā*ʾ in the

meaning "guardian, supervisor."

إِلاَّ مَنْ تَوَلَّى وَ كَفَرَ ﴿٢٣﴾

(88:23) ***except him who turns back and disbelieves,***

This exception pertains to the object of *So admonish* (88:21), which was omitted. The implied meaning is: "So admonish the people, except those of them who turn away from the admonition and disbelieve in it." Admonishing such people would be pointless and futile. Needless to say, turning away and disbelieving are subsequent to an initial admonition. Hence, what the exception in this verse negates is the subsequent and repeated stages of admonition. The effective meaning is: "Remind them all. And continue reminding everyone except for those who turn away from your first reminder and reject it. In such cases, it is not incumbent on you to continue admonishing. Rather, turn away from them, and leave it to God to punish them with the greatest punishment."

Accordingly, these verses—*So admonish… except him who turns back and disbelieves, so Allah will punish him with the greatest punishment* (88:22-24)—are comparable: *So admonish, if there is benefit in admonition. He who fears [God] will take admonition. And the most wretched will shun it—he who will enter the greatest fire* (87:9-12), which we discussed above.

Two other suggested views are:

(1) The exception in this verse pertains to *over them* in the last verse: *and you are not a taskmaster over them* (88:22). The meaning is: "You are not an authoritative taskmaster over them, except over those who turn away from the reminder and persist in disbelief. God will soon authorize you over them, and will command you to wage war against them and kill them."

(2) The exception in this verse is unconnected.[1] The meaning is: "You are not a taskmaster over them. But as with those who turn away and disbelieve among them, God will punish them with the greatest punishment."

Comment: Our interpretation above is more plausible and apparent.

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word because of their more similar orthographic and phonetic properties. (Ed.)

1 For unconnected exception, see the first footnote under verse 84:25 above. (Ed.)

فَيُعَذِّبُهُ اللَّهُ الْعَذابَ الْأَكْبَرَ ﴿٢٤﴾

(88:24) ***so Allah will punish him with the greatest punishment.***

This verse refers to the punishment of hell. As we said, it is the equivalent to the verse: *he who will enter the greatest fire* (87:12).

إِنَّ إِلَيْنا إِيابَهُمْ ﴿٢٥﴾

(88:25) ***Indeed to Us will be their return*** **(iyābahum).**

This verse serves as a justification for the punishment in the last verse. *Iyāb* is synonymous with *rujūᶜ* (return, referral). *To Us will be* is the predicate of the verse, which is mentioned before the subject [their return] for emphasis, and also to maintain the rhyme of the final words of the surrounding verses. In the case of the current verse, this way of expression does not indicate exclusivity because no one claims that the people would return to anyone other than God.[1]

ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنا حِسابَهُمْ ﴿٢٦﴾

(88:26) ***Then, indeed, their reckoning will lie with Us.***

This verse matches the last verse [in terms of meaning, structure and construct].

Examining Narrations

(1) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Every *nāṣib* (enemy of Ahl al-Bayt), no matter how much they may toil in worship, shall arrive at this verse: *labored and weary: Entering a scorching fire* (88:3-4).[2]

(2) The Messenger of God said: *Ḍarīᶜ* (88:6) is something in hell that resembles a thorn. It is bitterer than *ṣabir* (aloe gum), more reeking than carrion, and more scorching than fire. That is what God

1 In other words, the exclusivity of the return to God is already established. (Ed.)

2 *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*. This is also narrated in *Thawāb al-aᶜmāl*, via its chain of narration, with a slightly different wording at the end: "shall arrive at this end: *labored and weary: Entering a scorching fire* (88:3-4)."

has called *ḍarīʿ* (cactus).[1]

(3) Concerning *wherein they will not hear any vain talk* (88:11) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: That is jest and lie.

(4) Concerning *and you are not a taskmaster over them* (88:22) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: You are not a guardian or scribe over them.

(5) The Messenger of God said, "I have been ordered to combat with the people until they say *lā ilāh illā Allāh* (there is no god but God). Once they say that, they shall preserve their lives and possessions from me—except for a just cause [that is, a legal right]—and their accounts will be with God." Then he recited: *So admonish—for you are only an admonisher, and you are not a taskmaster over them* (88:21-22).[2]

Author's comment: It should be clear that there is no indication in this narration that the exception [in verse 88:23] pertains to *over them* (88:22).[3]

(6) Imam al-Bāqir said concerning *except him who turns back and disbelieves* (88:23): This refers to one who does not take admonition, does not confirm you [in your call], denies My Lordship, and is ungrateful to My blessings. *So Allah will punish him with the greatest punishment* (88:24): This means intense, excruciating and everlasting punishment. *Indeed to Us will be their return* (iyābahum) (88:25): It [*iyābahum*] means their *maṣīr* (return, journey, destination, end point). *Then, indeed, their reckoning will lie with Us* (88:26): This refers to their retribution.[4]

(7) Once Imam ʿAlī was asked, "How will God do the reckoning of the people despite their multitude?"

"Just as He provides them with sustenance," he explained, "despite their multitude."

He was asked, "How will He do their reckoning while they do not see Him?"

"Just as He provides them with sustenance while they do not see

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Shaybah, Aḥmad, ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasāʾī, Ibn Mājah, Ibn Jarīr, al-Ḥākim, Ibn Mardawayh and al-Bayhaqī's *al-Asmāʾ wa al-ṣifāt*, on the authority of Jābir.

3 In other words, the narration is compatible with the author's preferred interpretation of verse 88:23. (Ed.)

4 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

Him."[1]

(8) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: Every nation's reckoning will be done by the Imam of their time. And the Imams will recognize their friends and their foes by their marks. This is what God says: *And on the Elevations will be certain men who recognize each of them by their mark* (7:46).[2]

Author's comment: We discussed the meaning of this hadith under verse 7:46.[3]

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1 *Nahj al-balāghah*.

2 The same idea has been narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq in *Baṣāʾir al-darajāt*, via its chain of narration; from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Kāẓim in *al-Kāfī*; and from Imam al-Hādī in *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh* in Ziyārah Jāmiʿah.

3 See volume 15, pp. 179ff of the English translation. (Ed.)

Chapter 89

al-Fajr (The Dawn)

Verses 1-30

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful.

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 30 verses. It criticizes worldly attachments, which lead one to transgression and ungratefulness. It threatens such individuals with the severest punishments of God in this world and the next. It explains how humankind, due to their short-sightedness and misconception, imagine that it is for their honor before God that He bestows His bounties upon them, and that it shows their dishonor if they are afflicted with poverty and need. As a result of this view, they rebel and cause mischief on the earth when they are endowed, and fall into ingratitude when they lack. However, they are mistaken in this. The fact is that whatever they experience—including power, wealth, poverty and calamity—is a test and trial from God to reveal what the person would send forth from what they have in this world for their hereafter.

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Things are not as people imagine and claim. They will soon realize the fact of the matter when they face reckoning and punishment. At that point, it will become evident to them that whatever reached them—including poverty, wealth, potence and impotence—was a divine test. They will also learn that they could have sent ahead [good deeds] for their life tomorrow, but they failed to do so. Thus they chose punishment over reward. Achieving a happy life in the hereafter will only be the reward of a soul which has found peace with its Lord, which has submitted to His commands, which does not shake by the turmoil of calamities, which does not rebel when it is endowed with power, and which does not show ingratitude in the face of tragedy. The theme of the verses testify that the chapter was revealed in Mecca.

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وَ الْفَجْرِ ﴿١﴾

(89:1) ***By the dawn*** **(wa al-fajr)*!***

Fajr means "morning, dawn."[1] Apparently what is meant here is the dawn in an absolute sense [including all dawns]. It is also possible that it refers to the dawn of the tenth day of Dhū al-Ḥijjah, which is the Day of Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha, Yawm al-Naḥr). Other suggested interpretations are:

(1) The dawn of Dhū al-Ḥijjah.
(2) The dawn of Muḥarram, which is the beginning of the new year.
(3) The dawn of Friday.
(4) The dawn of the Night of Gathering (*laylat al-jamᶜ*).[2]
(5) The Morning Prayer.
(6) The entire day.
(7) The eruption (*fajr*) of springs from rocks.

Comment: There is more to the list, but they are all weak possibilities.

وَ لَيَالٍ عَشْرٍ ﴿٢﴾

(89:2) ***By ten nights!***

This apparently refers to the first ten days of Dhū al-Ḥijjah. The indefinite form of the verse indicates glorification and aggrandizement. Other suggested views are:

(1) The last ten days of Ramadan.
(2) The first ten days of Ramadan.
(3) The first ten days of Muḥarram.
(4) Worshiping for ten nights, assuming that *the dawn* (89:1) refers to the Morning Prayer.

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1 The letter *wāw* before *al-fajr* indicates a vow. The same applies to the same letter appearing before *ten nights* (89:2), *the Even* (89:3), *the Odd* (89:3) and *the night* (89:4). (Auth.)

2 This is the night before Eid al-Adha, when people gather in Muzdalifah to worship God, and to gather pebbles. This reduces to the second interpretation accepted by the author. This, however, was originally offered as an interpretation for *And by the night when it departs* (89:4). The word "dawn" was added to the interpretation later by mistake. See the suggested interpretation under verse 89:4 below. (Ed.)

وَ الشَّفْعِ وَ الْوَتْرِ ﴿٣﴾

(89:3) *By the Even* (al-shafʿ) *and by the Odd* (al-watr)*!*

Shafʿ is synonymous with *zawj* (even, couple, pair). Al-Rāghib says:

> *Shafʿ* means pairing and attaching a thing to something similar to it. *Shafʿ* is that which is paired and attached.

The Even can be matched with the Day of Tarwiyah (eighth of Dhū al-Ḥijjah), and *the Odd* with the Day of ʿArafah (ninth of Dhū al-Ḥijjah). This is the most appropriate interpretation assuming that the last two verses refer to the dawn of Dhū al-Ḥijjah and its first ten nights. Other suggested views are:

(1) The verse refers to the optional *shafʿ* and *watr* prayers at the end of the night.
(2) The verse refers to all prayers, since some of them are odd and some are even.
(3) *Shafʿ* is the Day of Sacrifice. *Watr* is the Day of ʿArafah.
(4) *Shafʿ* corresponds to all humankind, as per the verse: *And We created you in pairs* (78:8). *Watr* refers to God.

Comment: There are some narrations which express these views. We shall present them in our upcoming examination of narrations, by God's will.

(1) The verse refers to even and odd numbers. Swearing by them reminds the audience about the great blessing of having numbers for measurements.
(2) What is meant here is all beings, because everything is either even or odd.[1]
(3) *Watr* refers to Adam, who was paired and coupled (*shuffiʿa*) with his wife.[2]
(4) *Shafʿ* refers to all days and nights [in this world]. *Watr* signifies a day which will not be followed by night: the Day of Resurrection.
(5) *Shafʿ* corresponds to al-Ṣafā and al-Marwah [hills in Mecca]. *Watr* corresponds to the Holy House (Kaʿbah).

1 God is odd since He is absolute and simple. All other beings are even since they are compound. The former is the Necessary Being; the latter are contingent beings. (Ed.)

2 This means that *shafʿ* refers to Eve. (Ed.).

(6) *Shafᶜ* refers to the [seven] days when ᶜĀd was exterminated. *Watr* refers to their [eight] nights.[1]
(7) *Shafᶜ* refers to the gates of paradise, which are eight. *Watr* refers to the gates of hell, which are seven.

Comment: There is many more to be added to this list, reaching 36 views according to some exegetes. However, most of them involve unfounded impositions on the verse.

وَ اللَّيْلِ إِذا يَسْرِ ﴿٤﴾

(89:4) *By the night* (al-layl) *when it departs* (yasr, yasrī, from sary)*!*

Sary means the "passing and ending" of the night. The meaning is: "By the night, as it passes." Hence, this verse is similar to the verse, *and the night when it recedes* (74:33). The article *al-* in *al-layl* ("the" in *the night*) indicates the genus of night. Therefore, what is meant is the last part of *all* nights.

Some have suggested that the verse refers to the night of Muzdalifah specifically, which the night before the Day of Sacrifice. That is when the pilgrims journey (*yasrī*) from ᶜArafāt to Muzdalifah, gather there to worship God, and then depart for Miná in the morning.

The problem with this suggestion should be clear, especially based on the view that the *ten nights* (89:2) are the first ten nights [of Dhū al-Ḥijjah].

هَلْ فِي ذٰلِكَ قَسَمٌ لِذِي حِجْرٍ ﴿٥﴾

(89:5) *Is there an oath in that* (dhālika) *for one possessing intellect* (ḥijr)*?*

This is a rhetorical question which implies a confirmation. The demonstrative pronoun "that" (*dhālika*) refers to the above mentioned vows. *Ḥijr* means *ᶜaql* (intellect, reason, wit). The meaning is: "In what We said above there is a sufficient oath for anyone who has an intellect to comprehend what is said, and to distinguish between truth and falsehood." If God takes an oath for a statement, it emphasizes its correctness, beyond the shadow of a doubt. Also, God would only swear by something of significance and value.

The complement to the above vows is omitted since it is understood

1 This is deduced from verse 69:7. (Ed.)

from the subsequent verses, which cover the following themes: (1) the worldly and otherworldly punishments of those who are immersed in transgression and ingratitude [89:6-14, 89:17-26]; (2) the reward of the souls at peace [89:27-30]; (3) any blessing that God gives to someone or withholds from someone is only a test and trial [89:15-16]. Omitting the main clause of an oath and alluding to it indirectly serve to emphasize the chapter's main theme of warning and glad tidings.

أَ لَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِعادٍ ﴿٦﴾

(89:6) ***Have you not regarded how your Lord dealt with [the people of] ʿĀd,***

This verse refers to *the former ʿĀd* (53:50), whose prophet was Hūd, and who used to live in al-Aḥqāf (lit. sand-dunes) [46:21]. Their story is mentioned repeatedly in the Qur'an, and we discussed it in Sūrah Hūd [under verses 11:50-60].

إِرَمَ ذاتِ الْعِمادِ ﴿٧﴾ الَّتِي لَمْ يُخْلَقْ مِثْلُها فِي الْبِلادِ ﴿٨﴾

(89:7-8) ***Iram, possessor of the pillars* (ʿimād)*, the like of which was not created among cities?***

ʿImād (pillar, column, pole) is "that which upholds a structure." Its plural is *ʿamad*. These two verses describe a city of the tribe ʿĀd named Iram. It was apparently a prosperous and matchless city with lofty palaces and towering colonnades. Their stories have been lost through the passage of time, and their remains are effaced over the ages. We have no access to a detailed account of their case in a way that would satisfy a seeker's soul. All we have are brief accounts of them mentioned in the Qur'an, from which we can gather the following facts: (1) They were a tribe which came after Noah's tribe. (2) They lived in al-Aḥqāf [in Yemen]. (3) They were a powerful nation and physically sturdy people. (4) They were an advanced civilization, with prosperous cities, splendid places, and fecund lands that grew gardens, palm groves and farmlands. We already discussed their story [under verses 11:50-60].

Here are some other views on these verses:

(1) The word Iram denotes the people of ʿĀd as a patronymic designation. Originally, Iram was the name of their forefather. This is like using the name Quraysh for the entire tribe [that descended

from him], or applying Israel to the Children of Israel. "Being possessed of pillars" refers to their power and dominance. The meaning is: "Have you not seen what your Lord did to the ʿĀd tribe, who were the people of Iram? They were very mighty and powerful, the like of whom was not created among the people in terms of high stature, physical strength, and political influence—over other nations or throughout the earth."

Comment: This is far from the apparent meaning of the text.

(2) "Being possessed of pillars" means that they were a nomadic people who lived in tents. They would migrate in the springtime, and would then return to their homelands when the plants grew.

Comment: This is even farther from the apparent text of the verse than the last view. There are also mythical accounts about the famous Garden of Iram, narrated from Wahb b. Munabbih and Kaʿb al-Aḥbār.

وَ ثَمُودَ الَّذِينَ جابُوا الصَّخْرَ بِالْوادِ ﴿٩﴾

(89:9) ***And [the people of] Thamūd, who hollowed out* (jābū, from jawb)** ***the rocks in the valley.***

Jawb means "cutting, carving, cleaving." What is meant here is building houses in the mountains by hewing them. Hence, the verse is equivalent to the verse: *And you hew houses out of the mountains skillfully* (26:149).

وَ فِرْعَوْنَ ذِى الْأَوْتادِ ﴿١٠﴾

(89:10) ***And Pharaoh, possessor of pegs.***

This verse refers to the Pharaoh who was a contemporary of Moses. According to some narrations, he is called *possessor of pegs* because when he wanted to torture someone, he would peg the person's hands and feet on the ground or on a wooden surface. This can be confirmed by how he threatened the magicians when they believed in Moses, as reflected in the Qur'an: *then I will crucify you on the trunks of palm trees* (20:71). He used to affix the limbs of the victim on a wooden cross with pegs.

الَّذِينَ طَغَوْا فِى الْبِلادِ ﴿١١﴾ فَأَكْثَرُوا فِيهَا الْفَسادَ ﴿١٢﴾

(89:11-12) ***Those who rebelled [against Allah] in their cities and caused much corruption in them,***

These two verses describe ʿĀd, Thamūd and Pharaoh in the previous verses. The meaning should be clear.

فَصَبَّ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّكَ سَوْطَ عَذابٍ ﴿١٣﴾

(89:13) ***so your Lord poured*** **(fa-ṣabba)** ***on them a scourge of punishment.***

Ṣabb means "pouring down," as used for water. When used for "the whip of punishment," it is a metaphor for a recurrent, frequent and excruciating series of punishments. The indefinite form of *punishment* indicates glorification and aggrandizement. The meaning is: "For each of the above mentioned transgressors who caused abundant mischief, their transgression and abundant mischief was followed by a punishment that God poured on them. It was such an excruciating, recurrent and frequent punishment that defies description."

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَبِالْمِرْصادِ ﴿١٤﴾

(89:14) ***Indeed your Lord is ever in ambush*** **(la-bil-mirṣād).**

Mirṣād is "a place where one waits in ambush and on guard." Lying in ambush is used metaphorically for God. It compares how He records the acts of His servants to someone sitting in ambush to watch the person or the thing that they want to catch, as the victim comes to pass unaware. In like manner, God watches the deeds of His servants. And once they transgress and exceed in corruption, He seizes them with the severest of punishments.

This verse serves as an explanation and justification for the previous verses about God's punishment of the previous nations who caused abundant mischief. There is also a subtle point in referring to God as *your Lord*: It indicates that the divine custom of punishment is equally applicable to the Prophet's nation, just as it was applicable to the previous nations.

فَأَمَّا الْإِنْسانُ إِذا مَا ابْتَلاهُ رَبُّهُ فَأَكْرَمَهُ وَ نَعَّمَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَكْرَمَنِ ﴿١٥﴾

(89:15) ***As for man, whenever his Lord tests him and grants him honor and blesses him, he says, "My Lord has honored me."***

This verse and the next one describe the human condition when they are endowed with or deprived of worldly pleasures. The letter *fā*ʾ (so, then,

therefore) at the beginning of this verse shows that it builds on the previous discussion. It is as though the verses say: "Indeed humankind is under the watch of God, Who observes whether they improve for the better or deteriorate into corruption. To ascertain this, God tests and examines them by granting them a bounty, or by taking it away from them. This is the truth of the matter. However, humans take themselves to be honored and favored by God when He bestows a bounty upon them. They imagine that now they are entitled to act as they wish, so they transgress and exceed in mischief. And should He withhold His sustenance from them, they take that to be a sign of divine curse and dishonor. Accordingly, they fall into impatience and ingratitude."

As for man* (al-insān)*…: Given our interpretation above, what is meant by *al-insān* (man, the human being) is humankind in terms of their natural disposition.[1]

… whenever* (idhā) *his Lord tests him* (ibtalāhu, from ibtilā')*…: *Ibtilā'* means "examining, trying."[2]

… and grants him honor and blesses him…: This phrase interprets God's testing of humankind. What is meant here is *apparent* honoring and blessing. Alternatively, it means *initial* honoring and blessing, not a continued and perpetual one. That is, God honors them and grants them a blessing so that they may be grateful to their Lord and serve Him. However, they tend to turn that initial grace into a curse on themselves which brings about punishment.

… he says, "My Lord has honored me": There are two possible interpretations for this statement: (1) "By granting me these blessings, God is showing that I am honorable and virtuous to Him." (2) "The power and pleasure that He has given me are not only initial honors and blessings, but they shall continue and last forever. Hence, I may do as I wish."

This statement is an expression of humankind's mode of being and how they perceive things according to their natural inclination, not something that they would say verbally. Referring to God as *my Lord* implies the

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1 In other words, the article *al-* (the) indicates the genus of human beings in general (*jins*), not every single member of them exhaustively (*istighrāq*). (Auth.)

2 The word *idhā* (when, whenever) must be used with an operator, which is omitted here. The implied meaning is: "Whenever it happens (*kā'inan*) that his Lord…" It is also suggested that the operator is *fa-yaqūlu* (he says). (Auth.)

belief in God's Lordship. That is, the person considers God to direct the affairs of their life and universe. This was not something that the idolaters and atheists acknowledged. The statement is nevertheless attributable to them on the account of their pristine intuition (*fiṭrah*), which admitted God as their Lord. Besides, there is a stylistic consideration behind word choice in this sentence: to be consistent with *whenever his Lord tests him* (89:15) at the beginning of the verse.[1]

وَ أَمَّا إِذا مَا ابْتَلاهُ فَقَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَهانَنِ ﴿١٦﴾

(89:16) ***But when He tests him and tightens his provision against him, he says, "My Lord has dishonored me."***

The meaning is: "Whenever God tests and examines them by limiting their sustenance, they claim, 'My Lord has disgraced me and let me down.'" We can infer three points from these two verses [89:15-16]:

(1) The repetition of "testing" before both the granting and withholding of bounties indicates that both of them are components of divine examination, as opposed to how people view such events. God says: *and We try you with good and ill by way of test* (21:35).

(2) Inasmuch as bestowing bounties is a grace and mercy from God, it is a divine honor—conditional on the person not turning it into a misfortune for themselves.

(3) People tend to associate happiness and honor with material enjoyment. If one is not endowed with God's bounties in this world, they consider that as falling out of favor with Him. However, the fact of the matter is that honor lies in getting closer to God through belief and righteous deeds, which are equally accessible to the haves and have-nots. One's financial status of wealth or poverty is only a test and trial.

Exegetes have offered other views on these two verses, which we shall not present and discuss since there is not much benefit in that.

كَلاَّ بَلْ لا تُكْرِمُونَ الْيَتِيمَ ﴿١٧﴾

(89:17) ***Nay* (kallā)*! Rather* (bal)*, you do not honor the orphan,***

1 In other words, the person may not necessarily believe in God as their Lord, but the Qur'an has nevertheless used *my Lord* to match *his Lord* at the beginning of the verse. (Ed.)

The exclamation *kallā* (nay, never, no way) refutes people's common misconception that honor is defined by wealth and possessions, while poverty and lack are signs of disgrace and humiliation. The meaning is: "It is not as you say. Rather, both the giving and withholding of bounties by God are tests and trials through which He examines the people's level of servitude and obedience."

The word *bal* (rather, nay) serves two functions here: (1) It adds a tone of rebuke to the verse. This sense of censure is intensified by a shift from the third person to the second person [to rebuke the audience directly]. (2) It reiterates the refutation implied by *kallā*. It does so by introducing several examples where the person lacks virtue and value even though they are well-to-do: (i) when they do not honor the orphans; (ii) when they usurp the properties of orphans and do not give them what belongs to them; (iii) when they do not support feeding the needy due to their intense love for money. The human *fiṭrah* (primal nature, innate disposition, pristine conscience) would no doubt rule that there is no honor in this way of being wealthy.

… Rather, you do not honor the orphan: What is meant by "not honoring them" is depriving them of their father's inheritance, as the minors at the time were not entitled to inheritance. They were left empty-handed, no matter how hard they would be pressed for their basic needs. This can be confirmed by a verse below: *and you eat the inheritance rapaciously* (89:19).

وَ لا تَحَاضُّونَ عَلى طَعامِ الْمِسْكِينِ ﴿١٨﴾

(89:18) ***and do not urge*** **(taḥāḍḍūna)** ***the feeding of the needy,***

What is meant here is encouraging one another to give charity to the poor and the needy.[1] The source of this [lack of philanthropy] was their love for wealth, as we read below: *and you love wealth…* (89:20).

وَ تَأْكُلُونَ التُّراثَ أَكْلاً لَمًّا ﴿١٩﴾

(89:19) ***and you eat the inheritance rapaciously*** **(lamman),**

Lamm means "consuming the share of oneself and others." That is, taking up whatever one finds with no consideration of whether it is lawful or unlawful. This verse interprets their failure to honor the orphans

1 The verb *taḥāḍḍūna* was originally *tataḥāḍḍūna*. (Auth.)

[89:17], as we explained.

وَ تُحِبُّونَ الْمالَ حُبًّا جَمًّا ﴿٢٠﴾

(89:20) ***and you love wealth with much fondness*** **(jamman).**

Jamm means "abundant, great." This verse interprets their failure to urge feeding the needy [89:18], as we explained.

كَلاَّ إِذا دُكَّتِ الْأَرْضُ دَكًّا دَكًّا ﴿٢١﴾

(89:21) ***Nay! When the earth is leveled*** **(dakkan)** ***to a plain,***

Dakk means "intense hammering, powerful striking." The word *when* corresponds to the Day of Resurrection. The exclamation *kallā* (nay, never, no way) shows a second refutation [after the one in verse 89:17] of what humans say [through their mode of being] at times of affluence and lack. And what comes after it—*When the earth is leveled…* (89:21ff)—is a justification for that refutation. The effective meaning is: "It is not how the people suppose. They will realize, when the Resurrection occurs, that the life of this world and all that transpires therein—including wealth, poverty and so on—are not final goals which are intended for their own sake. Rather, they are tests and trials from God to differentiate between the felicitous and the wretched. They are also an opportunity for the people to prepare for themselves the means by which they would live in the hereafter. However, they are mistaken and confused, for they imagine these endowments to be honors and values that should be sought for their own sake. Thus they get engaged by these endeavors, and fail to send ahead anything for their eternal life. They will regret at that point, and will wish: *had I sent ahead for my life!* (89:24). But their wish will not spare them anything of the punishment."

وَ جاءَ رَبُّكَ وَ الْمَلَكُ صَفًّا صَفًّا ﴿٢٢﴾

(89:22) ***and your Lord comes, and the angels rank on rank,***

The idea of God's "coming" is an ambiguous (*mutashābih*) expression which is overruled by decisive verses such as: *Nothing is like Him* (42:11). This expression should be interpreted under the light of other *muḥkam* (decisive, solid, clear) verses which describe the properties of the Day of Resurrection. Some of these properties are: (i) All causal links and

means of recourse will be cut off [2:166]. (ii) The veils [of ignorance and heedlessness] will be lifted from the people [so that they may observe the truth; 40:16, 50:22]. (iii) It will become patent *that Allah is the Manifest Reality* (24:25).

In the same light, there are some narrations which interpret the "coming" of God as the coming of His *amr* (command, verdict, matter, affair), corresponding to the verse: *and all command* (al-amr) *that day will belong to Allah* (82:19). This interpretation can be somewhat supported by adding the following two verses together: *Do they await anything but that Allah should come to them in the shades of the clouds, with the angels, and the matter be decided [once for all]?* (2:210); *Do they await anything but that the angels should come to them, or your Lord's command* (amr) *should come?* (16:33).[1] Based on this view, there is an omitted *muḍāf* (annexed noun, construct noun) in the verse. The implied meaning is: "and your Lord's command comes."

Another possible explanation is that "coming" is ascribed to God figuratively. We already explained what is meant by the coming of the angels, and their lining up in ranks.[2]

وَ جِیۡءَ یَوۡمَئِذٍۭ بِجَهَنَّمَ یَوۡمَئِذٍ یَّتَذَکَّرُ الۡاِنۡسَانُ وَ اَنّٰی لَهُ الذِّکۡرٰی ﴿۲۳﴾

(89:23) ***the day when hell is brought [near], on that day man will take admonition, but what will that admonition avail him?***

Hell "being brought" probably refers to its unveiling, as reflected elsewhere in the Qur'an: *and hell is brought into view for one who sees* (79:36); *and hell will be brought into view for the perverse* (26:91); *You were certainly oblivious of this. We have removed your veil from you, and so your sight is sharp today* (50:22).

… on that day man will take admonition…: Based on the theme and context of the verses, the meaning is: "They will realize in the most patent way that anything pleasant or unpleasant that they were given in their

1 There is an almost identical expression in verse 6:158, with the difference that it says *or your Lord should come* instead *or your Lord's command should come* (16:33). Matching the two verses clarifies that what is meant by "the coming of God" is "the coming of His command (*amr*)." (Ed.)

2 For the coming of the angels, see volume 3, pp. 135ff of the English translation, under verse 2:210; and volume 14, p. 228, under verse 6:158. For the ranks of angels, see verse 78:38 above. (Ed.)

worldly life was a test and trial from God. They will also realize that they fell short of preparing for their future eternal life."

… but what* (anná) *will that admonition avail him?: This is a way of saying that they will not benefit from their awakening at that point. Admonitions and reminders are useful as long as one has the means and opportunity to make up for what they have missed through repentance and righteous deeds. However, that day will be a day of retribution, not a day of repentance and action. The word *anná* means "how, from where."[1]

يَقُولُ يا لَيْتَنِي قَدَّمْتُ لِحَياتِي ﴿٢٤﴾

(89:24) ***He will say, "Alas, had I sent ahead for my life!"***

There are two possible interpretations for *my life*: (1) "My life here," which means the person's life in the hereafter. (2) "My real life," which again is one's life in the hereafter. This verse corresponds to the verse: *The life of this world is nothing but diversion and play, but the abode of the Hereafter is indeed Life, had they known* (29:64).

"Sending ahead for one's life" means doing righteous deeds ahead of time to serve one's eternal life. The wish expressed in this verse is what humans will yearn for when they are awakened on the Day of Resurrection, but realize that their awakening is of no avail to him.

فَيَوْمَئِذٍ لا يُعَذِّبُ عَذابَهُ أَحَدٌ ﴿٢٥﴾ وَ لا يُوثِقُ وَثاقَهُ أَحَدٌ ﴿٢٦﴾

(89:25-26) ***On that day none shall punish as He punishes, and none shall bind as He binds.***

The antecedent of the pronoun "He" in both verses is God. The meaning is: "On that day, no one amongst His creatures will give out God's punishment. Nor will any of His creatures bind God's binding." In other words, God's punishment and binding on that day will be far greater than any punishment and binding that the creatures can administer. This emphasizes and intensifies the theme of warning in these verses.

According to another recitation of the verses, the verbs are in the passive voice: *lā yuʿadhdhabu* (he is not punished) and *lā yūthaqu* (he is not bound), where the pronouns "he" would refer to the human being. The

1 In other words: "This is too late. Where has this admonition been? From where has it come to help him? How could it possibly save him now?" (Ed.)

meaning would be: "On that day no one will be punished like this person. Nor will anyone be confined the way this person is confined."

يا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ﴿٢٧﴾

(89:27) ***O soul at peace!***

This verse and the following verses are mentioned in contradistinction with the previous verses. Therefore, we can infer the qualities of this group by contrast. The previous group were those who are attached to this world, transgress their limits, cause corruption, and are ungrateful. Accordingly, the *soul at peace* is someone who: (1) finds peace with its Lord; (2) is satisfied with what God is satisfied with; (3) sees itself a servant that is not in charge of any good, evil, benefit or loss; (4) views this world as a temporary abode to pass; and (5) realizes that everything in this life—such as wealth, poverty, gain and loss—is a divine test and tribulation. As a result, such a soul is not led into transgression, excess corruption, ascendancy or pride at times of abundance; nor into ungratefulness or disbelief at times of poverty and lack. Rather, the soul is firmly established in servitude, and does not deviate from the straight path to either extreme of excess or deficiency.

ارْجِعِي إِلى رَبِّكِ راضِيَةً مَرْضِيَّةً ﴿٢٨﴾

(89:28) ***Return to your Lord, pleased and pleasing!***

The person receives this address throughout the entire Day of Resurrection, from when they are raised to life, until when they settle in paradise. In fact, it is applicable from the time of one's death until they enter paradise. Some have said that this call will be made only after the reckoning, but that is not the case.

… pleased…: There are two elements of being pleased with God: (1) being pleased with His existential and creational decrees (*takwīnī*); (2) being pleased with His legislative and imperative decrees (*tashrīʿī*). The former means that one would not be upset with anything that occurs to them. The latter means that one would not be unsettled by the temptation to sin.

… and pleasing: Once the servant is pleased with their Lord, their Lord will be pleased with the servant as well, because what dissatisfies God is transgressing the limits of servitude. Hence, when a servant observes the path of servitude, God will certainly be pleased with them. That is why the two qualities are mentioned in this sequence.

فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبادِي ﴿٢٩﴾

(89:29) ***Then enter among My servants!***

The letter *fāʾ* (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of this verse indicates that this is a conclusion and consequence of *Return to your Lord* (89:28). We can infer from this that the *soul at peace* (89:27) is among the servants of God. That is, it has reached the station of servitude. Being at peace with one's Lord means ceasing to consider any independence for oneself, and being pleased with the truth that comes from God. Such a person would see their Lord to be the absolute owner of their essence, attributes and actions. As a result, they would only desire what their Lord desires in terms of existential events in the world of creation, as well as commands and prohibitions in the world of legislation. This is the perfection of servitude in a person. Accordingly, *Then enter among My servants* is a confirmation of the person's station of servitude.

وَ ادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي ﴿٣٠﴾

(89:30) ***And enter My paradise!***

This verse determines the soul's residence. This is the only verse in the Qur'an where God ascribes paradise to Himself directly: *My paradise*. This indicates a very special honor and glorification [of the servant's position].

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning *By the Even* (al-shafʿ) *and by the Odd* (al-watr) (89:3) the Prophet said: *Shafʿ* is all humankind, because God says: *And We created you in pairs* (78:8). *Watr* is God.[1]

(2) In another narration the Prophet said: *The Even and the Odd* are the prayers, some of which are even and some of which are odd.[2]

(3) In another narration the Prophet said: *Shafʿ* is the Day of Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha, Yawm al-Naḥr). *Watr* is the Day of ʿArafah.[3]

1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī. The book has also narrated this from ʿAṭiyyah al-ʿAwfī, Abū Ṣāliḥ, Ibn ʿAbbās and Mujāhid.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Ibn Ḥuṣayn.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Ibn Jābir. The book has also narrated this from Ibn ʿAbbās, ʿIkrimah and al-Ḍaḥḥāk.

Author's comment: The connection here is that the Day of ᶜArafah is a single day, but the Day of Sacrifice is coupled with (*yushfaᶜu*) the Day of Departure (Yawm al-Nafr).[1] These three narrations are also reported through Sunni chains of narration. We can reconcile them with one another by saying that *the Even and the Odd* are meant in an unqualified sense in the verse, and these narrations provide some examples and applications of them [without *restricting* the verse's meaning or *negating* other applications].

(4) It is narrated from Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq: *Shafᶜ* is the Day of Tarwiyah (eighth of Dhū al-Ḥijjah). *Watr* is the Day of ᶜArafah (ninth of Dhū al-Ḥijjah).[2]

(5) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *By ten nights* (89:2): These are the ten [first] days of Dhū al-Ḥijjah. *By the Even* (al-shafᶜ) *and by the Odd* (al-watr) (89:3): *Shafᶜ* is the two units (*rakᶜah*), while *watr* is a sole unit [of the optional Night Prayer].

(6) According to a ḥadith, *Shafᶜ* refers to al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, and *watr* is the Commander of the Faithful [Imam ᶜAlī].[3]

(7) Concerning *By the night when it departs* (89:4) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: This refers to the Night of Gathering (*laylat al-jamᶜ*) [in Muzdalifah]

(8) Concerning *one possessing* ḥijr (89:5) Imam al-Bāqir said: [It means] one possessing *ᶜaql* (intellect, reason, wit).[4]

(9) Concerning *And Pharaoh, possessor of pegs* (89:10) once Imam al-Ṣādiq was asked: "Why was he called *possessor of pegs*?" The Imam explained, "Because when he wanted to torture someone, he would lay the person on the ground face down, would stretch the persons arms and legs, and would then nail them with four pegs into the ground. And sometimes he would affix the person on a wide wooden surface, and would nail the person's hands and

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1 The Day of ᶜArafah is the ninth of Dhū al-Ḥijjah. It is the only day when the pilgrims are required to stay in ᶜArafāt. The Day of Sacrifice the tenth of Dhū al-Ḥijjah, when the pilgrims are in Miná. Their stay continues to the eleventh (called Yawm al-Qarr) and the twelfth (called the first Yawm al-Nafr), and sometimes to the thirteenth (called the second Yawm al-Nafr). See verse 2:203. (Ed.)

2 *Majmajᶜ al-bayān*.

3 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*.

4 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

feet on it with four pegs. Then he would leave the person in that condition until they died. That is why God has called Pharaoh *possessor of pegs*."[1]

(10) Concerning *Indeed your Lord is ever in ambush* (89:14) Imam ʿAlī said: It means that your Lord is capable of repaying the sinners [what they deserve].[2]

Author's comment: This narration shows that the verse's expression is metaphorical.

(11) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: *Mirṣād* (ambush; 89:14) is a part of the bridge (*ṣirāṭ*) that no servant may pass if they have wronged another servant.[3]

(12) Concerning *And Dhū al-Nūn, when he left in a rage, thinking* (fa-ẓanna) *that We would not straiten against him* (21:87) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: *Ẓanna* (he thought, he speculated) here means *istayqana* (he was certain, he knew for sure). He was certain that God will not straiten his provision against him. Have you not heard of His words: *But when He tests him and tightens* (naqdira) *his provision against him* (89:16), where *naqdira* means *ḍayyaqa* (tightens, restricts, presses)?[4]

(13) Concerning *Nay! When the earth is leveled to a plain* (89:21) Imam al-Bāqir said: That is the quake [of the Hour; 22:1, 99:1].[5]

(14) The Messenger of God said: "Do you know the meaning of these verses: *Nay! When the earth is leveled… the day when hell is brought* (89:21-23)?" Then he explained: "On the Day of Resurrection, hell will be dragged forth with seventy thousand reins in the hands of seventy thousand angels. Then it will flare up a flame which would certainly burn the heavens and the earth—were it not that

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1 *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*, on the authority of Abān al-Aḥmar, via its chain of narration.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

4 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of *Ghawālī al-laʾālī*, part of a longer hadith. (Auth.)
This narration could not be found in either *Majmaʿ al-bayān* or *Ghawālī al-laʾālī*, but it is narrated from Imam al-Riḍā in *al-ʿUyūn*. Also note that *Ghawālī al-laʾālī* more commonly known as *ʿAwālī al-laʾālī*. (Ed.)

5 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

God shall confine it."[1]

(15) Once Imam al-Riḍā was inquired about the verse, *and your Lord comes, and the angels rank on rank* (89:22). He said: Coming and going are not applicable attributes to God. Glory be to Him! He is transcendent of movement and transition. What is meant here is your Lord's *command* comes.[2]

(16) Sadīr al-Ṣayrafī said: Once I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq, "May I be your ransom, O son of God's Messenger! Would a believer have any displeasure upon the parting of his soul?"

He replied, "No, by God! When the Angel of Death comes to seize his soul, he will fret at first. But the Angle of Death will say, 'Don't worry, O friend of God! By the One Who sent Muḥammad [as a messenger], I am more compassionate and benevolent to you than a kind father by the deathbed of his son. Open up your eyes and see!'

Then the Messenger of God, the Commander of the Faithful [Imam ʿAlī], Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn, and the Imams from their progeny will appear to him. He will be told, 'Here are the Messenger of God, the Commander of the Faithful, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn and the Imams. They shall be your companions.'

He opens his eyes and looks. Then a caller from God will address his soul, '*O soul at peace* (89:27) with Muḥammad and his family! *Return to your Lord, pleased* (89:28) with *wilāyah* (divine guardianship, spiritual authority) [of the Imams], *and pleasing* (89:28) by [being granted] reward. *Then enter among My servants* (89:29), meaning Muḥammad and his Household (Ahl al-Bayt). *And enter My paradise* (89:30).' At that point, he will not love anything as much as the leaving his body and joining the caller."[3]

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. The book has also narrated this from the Prophet on the authority of Abū Saʿīd and Ibn Masʿūd. It is also reported through Shia chains of narration in al-Ṭūsī's *al-Amālī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Dāwūd b. Sulaymān, from Imam al-Riḍā, from his fathers, from Imam ʿAlī, from the Messenger of God.

2 *Al-ʿUyūn*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿAlī b. Faḍḍāl, on the authority of his father.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration. The same idea has been reported by al-Qummī in his *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, and by al-Barqī in *al-Maḥāsin*.

Chapter 90

al-Balad (The Town)

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Verses 1-20

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful.

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 20 verses. It reminds the audience that the creation of humankind is based on hardship and toil. One cannot find any aspect of life that is not coupled with the bitterness of striving and hardship, beginning from when the spirit is blown into the body until one's death. There is no pure comfort and happiness—free from adversity, trouble, misery and misfortune—except with God in the hereafter.

Accordingly, one must shoulder the burden of divine obligations, patiently persevere with obedience, and refrain from disobedience. One should also strive hard to spread out compassion to those who are afflicted by the calamities of life, such as orphanage, impoverishment, illness and so on. This way, one will be among the people of good fortune. Otherwise, one's next life will be like their first life, as they will be among the people of misfortune, doomed to a closed fire.

The theme of the verses in this chapter resembles the theme of Meccan chapters. Some have claimed a consensus [among the scholars] on the chapter being Meccan. Some have claimed that it is Medinan, but the theme of the verses does not support this. Some have claimed that its verses were revealed in Medina except for the first four verses. We shall discuss this under our upcoming examination of narrations, by God's will.

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لَا أُقْسِمُ بِهٰذَا الْبَلَدِ ﴿١﴾

(90:1) ***I swear by this town,***

As some exegetes have said, *this town* is Mecca. This can be corroborated by two points: (1) the theme of the chapter, which is Meccan; (2) the

verse, *By a father and what he begot* (90:3), especially if Abraham is the intended father in the verse. We shall discuss this below.

وَ أَنْتَ حِلٌّ بِهذَا الْبَلَدِ ﴿٢﴾

(90:2) *as you reside* (ḥill) *in this town!*

Instead of using a pronoun, *this town* is repeated in the verse. This usage reflects the Speaker's attention, respect and honor for *the town*, which is a holy city.[1] The meaning is: "I swear by this town while you are a resident of it." This expression indicates that Mecca is honored *because* of the Prophet's residence and presence there, and/or because of it being his birthplace.

Another suggested view is that this verse is a parenthetical remark between the vow in the last verse and its complement below [90:4]. Furthermore, *ḥill* means one whose *ḥurmah* (honor, sanctuary) is violated. *Al-Kashshāf* has elaborated this in two ways:[2]

(1) *And you are disrespected in this town* is added as an aside between the oath [in the last verse] and its complement [in verse 90:4]. It means: "It is very unfortunate that someone like you, notwithstanding your exalted rank and honor, is being persecuted in this town, much like how animals are hunted outside the sanctuary [of Mecca].

Shuraḥbīl interpreted the verse: "They regard it unlawful to hunt an animal or harvest a tree in the sanctuary of Mecca, but they have no qualms about driving you out of the town or even killing you."

This expression fortifies the Messenger of God and encourages him to be steadfast in the face of the troubles caused by the people of Mecca. It also indicates surprise at their animosity against him.

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1 This verse serves as a *ḥāl* (circumstantial qualifier, participial phrase, adverb) for *this town* (90:1). *Ḥill* is a *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund), synonymous with *ḥulūl*, meaning "inhabiting, staying and settling" in a place. A *maṣdar* here serves as an *ism al-fāʿil* (nominative substantive, active participial noun). (Auth.)

That is, the verse literally says, "You are a *residence*" but it means "You are a *resident*." (Ed.)

2 The verse's translation has been modified in both cases to reflect the suggested view, according to the different possible meanings of the word *ḥill*. (Ed.)

(2) Another possibility is that the chapter consoles the Messenger of God by saying that the human being is never devoid of facing hardship [90:4], which is emphasized by swearing to his town [90:1]. Then to further solace and comfort the Prophet's soul, God promises him, as a side note, that he shall conquer Mecca: *and you shall be unrestricted in this town*. The meaning is: "Soon you shall be free to do as you wish in this town, and it will be lawful for you to kill or take captive whomever you want."

Both of these suggested meanings are based on interpreting *ḥall* as *muḥill* (one who is under no protection, one who is free from restriction), which is the antonym of *muḥrim* (one who is protected, one who is restricted). The meaning would be: "We will soon suspend the restrictions on the sanctuary of Mecca for you. That is when you shall conquer the city, whereby you may wage war and kill whomever you want."

وَ والِدٍ وَ ما وَلَدَ ﴿٣﴾

(90:3) ***By a father and what* (mā) *he begot!***

There must be some consonance between an oath and the object by which one takes the oath. Accordingly, there must be a clear connection between *the town* which was sworn by (90:1) and *a father and what he begot*.[1] This makes Abraham and Ishmael clear candidates for the current verse. After all, they were the two architects who built the city of Mecca and raised the Holy House. God says: *And when Abraham, and Ishmael with him, raised up the foundations of the House* (2:127). Also, it was Abraham who asked God to make Mecca a secure town: *When Abraham said: My Lord! Make this city a sanctuary* (14:35).[2]

The meaning is: "I swear by a great father: Abraham. And I swear by the amazing and blessed son that he fathered: Ishmael. They were the

1 Both verses 90:1 and 90:3 present oaths. The message of the oath comes in the next verse. Nevertheless, when there are a series of oaths, it is natural to have a connection between them. (Ed.)

2 The indefinite form of *father* indicates glorification and aggrandizement. Likewise, instead of using the particle *man* (whom, who), the verse has used the particle *mā* (what). This implies a sense of being pleasantly surprised and impressed by the child, and praising his character. A similar expression is stated with reference to Holy Mary: *and Allah knew better what she had borne* (3:36). (Auth.)

two founders of this town." In short, these three verses swear by the Holy Mecca, by the Prophet who resided there, and by Abraham and Ishmael who built it.

Here are a few other suggested interpretations for the verse:

(1) *Father* is Abraham, and *what he begot* includes all Arabs who descended from him.

Comment: The problem with this view is that it is very unlikely that God would swear, in the same thread, by the Prophet, by Abraham, and also by the likes of Abū Lahab and Abū Jahl, who were the chiefs of infidelity and paganism. In fact, Prophet Abraham dissociated himself from those of his descendants who would not follow him in monotheism, as God narrates from him: *and save me and my children from worshiping idols. My Lord! Indeed they have misled many people. So whoever follows me indeed belongs to me, and as for someone who disobeys me, well, You are indeed Ever-Forgiving, Ever-Merciful* (14:35-36). Accordingly, if one wishes to interpret *what he begot* as Abraham's progeny, it should be restricted to the *believers* among his descendants. This is reflected in a supplication that Abraham and Ishmael made upon building the Kaʿbah: *Our Lord, make us submissive to You, and [raise] from our progeny a nation submissive to You, and show us our rites [of worship], and turn to us clemently* (2:128).

(2) *Father and what he begot* correspond, respectively, to Adam and all his progeny. The message of the vows in these verses is that humans are created in hardship [90:4]. Moreover, procreation is an integral part of their existence, as ordained by God for this species. The chapter swears by this divinely ordained custom of procreation—by saying, *By a father and what he begot*—and then states that the creation of the human being is fraught with toil and trouble from the day they are born until they die.

Comment: This view is correct in and of itself. However, it does not provide a connecting link between this verse and the previous vows. It fails to explain why the chapter swears by Mecca, and then by the father and all his children, all in a single thread.

(3) What is meant is Adam and his righteous descendants.

Comment: Apparently this view is offered to hold God clear from swearing by His enemies, such as the disbelievers, sinners, transgressors and mischief-mongers.

(4) What is meant is every father and every child.

(5) What is meant is those who sire and those who do not sire. This is

based on the particle *mā* being negative (*nāfiyah*, meaning "not") rather than relative (*mawṣūlah*, meaning "what").

(6) *Father* is the Prophet, and *what he begot* is his ummah (nation, people), in the sense that he is like a father for his ummah.

Comment: All of these are far from the apparent meaning of the verses.

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لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ ﴿٤﴾

(90:4) ***Certainly We created man in travail*** **(kabad).**

This verse is the main complement and message of the oaths in the previous verses. *Kabad* means "toil, exhaustion." The fact that toil and trouble envelop and encompass all aspects of human life is no secret to any intelligent person. While one tends to aim for the purest, choicest and most perfect of worldly pleasures, what one ends up getting is always mixed with elements of struggle and suffering, which spoil and ruin everything. Not to mention the tragedies and natural disasters which catch the person off-guard.

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أَيَحْسَبُ أَنْ لَنْ يَقْدِرَ عَلَيْهِ أَحَدٌ ﴿٥﴾

(90:5) ***Does he suppose that no one ever has power over him?***

This verse is like a conclusion to the previous verse. It can be elaborated as follows: It was said that the human creation is founded on travail, and is immersed in it. One never achieves what one desires fully, if at all. Given this, it follows that human creation is subject to a higher power. Their wishes and plans are restricted to certain limits that are placed on them. The One Who overrides their desires and enshrouds them in His destiny is the Almighty God. He is the One Who overpowers them in every dimension and from all sides. Thus, He may manage them as He wills, and may seize them [with punishment] whenever He desires.

Therefore, humans should not imagine that they are not monitored by anyone. Such an impression [of independence] could lead them to a number of consequences: (1) They may rebel and disobey God [by sinning]. (2) They may refrain arrogantly from serving and obeying Him. (3) They may spend their assets in God's way as He has ordered, but may then consider that to be a great contribution, as though God is indebted to them. (4) They may perform an act for God, but may then deceive Him through

showing off, pretense and ostentation (*riyāʾ* and *sumʿah*). Such is the case when *He says, "I have squandered immense wealth"* (90:6).

يَقُولُ أَهْلَكْتُ مالاً لُبَداً ﴿٦﴾

(90:6) ***He says, "I have squandered immense*** **(lubadan)** ***wealth."***

Lubad means "abundant, much, a lot." We can infer from the context of this verse and the following verses—to the end of the chapter—that they refer to a specific incident. Apparently there was someone who had professed to be a Muslim—or had inclined to the religion—who spent some of his wealth in charity, and then started to boast in his act by saying: *"I have squandered immense wealth."* He considered his payment to be abundant and impressive. Subsequently, these verses were revealed, where God rejected his claim, and explained that achieving true fortune and felicity in life hinges on embarking on a rough journey, venturing a defile, and attempting a rugged valley in terms of spending in God's way [90:11-16]. One must be among those who believe and enjoin each other to patience and mercy [90:17]. This interpretation is confirmed by what we shall see in the upcoming examination of narrations, by God's will.

أَ يَحْسَبُ أَنْ لَمْ يَرَهُ أَحَدٌ ﴿٧﴾

(90:7) ***Does he suppose that no one sees him?***

This verse indirectly refutes an implication of the statement, *"I have squandered immense wealth."* One would make this claim as though God is heedless and ignorant of one's good deed. This is a mistake, because God is All-Seeing of one's spending. The thing is that this amount of sacrifice does not suffice to secure one a truly felicitous and blissful life. One has no alternative but to endure a more taxing burden of servitude in order to achieve this goal. One must embark on the narrow pass, join the group of believers, and demonstrate their virtues [90:11-17].

أَ لَمْ نَجْعَلْ لَهُ عَيْنَيْنِ ﴿٨﴾

(90:8) ***Have We not made for him two eyes,***

We have equipped their body with the faculty of vision so that they can learn about visible objects according to their capacity.

وَ لِساناً وَ شَفَتَيْنِ ﴿٩﴾

(90:9) *a tongue, and two lips,*

We have endowed them with a tongue and two lips by which they can speak. This way they can communicate the knowledge that they hold within, and can also learn about things that cannot be discerned by eyesight.

وَ هَدَيْناهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ ﴿١٠﴾

(90:10) *and shown him the two paths [of good and evil]* (al-najdayn)*?*

Najd means "a path on a plateau." What is meant here are the two paths of good and evil. They are called *najd* (uphill path) since both of them require effort and struggle. Some have interpreted *najdayn* as the two breasts of one's mother, but that is an unlikely possibility.

The meaning is: "We have taught them the path of good and the path of evil through an inspiration from Us. Thus, they recognize good and can distinguish it from evil." Therefore, this verse is comparable to the verse: *By the soul and by What fashioned it, then inspired it with [discernment between] its virtues and its vices* (91:7-8).

These three verses [90:8-10] provide supporting evidence for the verse: *Does he suppose that no one sees him?* (90:7). That verse had three main implications: (1) God observes the deeds of His servants. (2) He knows the myriad things that they hold in their hearts. (3) He can discriminate between their good and bad. These verses confirm these implications as follows: (1) God has endowed humankind with eyes so that they can learn about visible things. Now, how could He be ignorant of something that He has made known to others? (2) He has guided humankind to learn about what people hold in their souls through speech. Now, how could He be veiled from something that He has unveiled to others? (3) He has taught humankind the distinction between good and evil through His inspiration. Now, how could He not know what they are? How could He be unable to differentiate between them? Thus it follows that: (1) God sees human actions. (2) He knows their intentions. (3) He discerns whether they are good or evil, virtuous or wicked.

فَلا اقْتَحَمَ الْعَقَبَةَ ﴿١١﴾

(90:11) *Yet he has not ventured* (iqtaḥama, from iqtiḥām) *the defile* (ʿaqabah).

Iqtiḥām means "entering rapidly, proceeding forcefully, attempting with effort, laborious embarking." *ʿAqabah* means "a rugged steep incline that is difficult to pass."[1] "Venturing the defile" refers to a charity expenditure that is difficult for the donor, as interpreted explicitly in the following verses. Some have said that this verse is a curse on the one who said: *"I have squandered immense wealth"* (90:6).[2] However, this is unfounded.

وَ ما أَدْراكَ مَا الْعَقَبَةُ ﴿١٢﴾

(90:12) *And what will show you what is the defile?*

This verse glorifies and emphasizes the significance of *al-ʿaqabah* (the defile, the steep ascent, the difficult mountain), as we have explained in other similar verses.[3]

فَكُّ رَقَبَةٍ ﴿١٣﴾

(90:13) *[It is] the freeing* (fakk) *of a slave,*

Fakk means "manumission, liberation, release." There is an omitted feminine "it is" (*hiya*) at the beginning of this verse, referring to the feminine noun *ʿaqabah* (90:11-12). The implied meaning is: "The defile is the freeing of a slave." Hence, *the defile* (90:11-12) is the very act of freeing, and having *ventured the defile* (90:11) means taking up, attempting and performing this act.[4]

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1 *ʿAqabah* (defile, steep ascent, difficult mountain) signifies an arduous task. Notice that "defile" is used as a noun here, not a verb. The imagery here is that of a journey through a toilsome mountainous path with rugged narrow passes and jagged rocky canyons. This theme can be compared to the concept of "strait gate" in the words of Christ: "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." Matthew 7:13-14 (NIV). (Ed.)

2 The meaning would be: "May you be stranded on a rugged defile." (Ed.)

3 See verses 69:3, 74:27, 77:14, 82:17-18, 83:8, 83:19, 86:2, 97:2, 101:3, 101:10, 104:5. (Ed.)

4 In short, the verses are saying: "Yet he did not complete the major task, which

Some have said that there is an omitted masculine "it is" (*huwa*) at the beginning of this verse, referring to the masculine noun *iqtiḥām* (90:11), which means that there is also an omitted word *iqtiḥām* (venturing) in the last verse. The implied meaning is: "And what will show you what is venturing the defile? Venturing the defile is to free a slave." However, our explanation above should clarify that there is no need for this contrivance.

This verse and the next three verses [90:14-16] interpret the defile as freeing a slave and feeding others in times of starvation. These are applications of spreading mercy among the people [90:17], which are stated explicitly due to their importance. Similarly, freeing a slave is mentioned first to show Islam's utmost degree of attention and importance given to the liberation of slaves.

أَوْ إِطْعامٌ فِي يَوْمٍ ذِي مَسْغَبَةٍ ﴿١٤﴾ يَتِيماً ذا مَقْرَبَةٍ ﴿١٥﴾ أَوْ مِسْكِيناً ذا مَتْرَبَةٍ﴿١٦﴾

(90:14-16) ***or feeding [the needy] on a day of starvation*** **(masghabah)*****, or an orphan among relatives*** **(dhā maqrabah)*****, or a dust-ridden*** **(dhā matrabah)** ***needy,***

Masghabah means "famine, starvation." *Maqrabah* means "blood relation." *Matrabah* is derived from *turāb* (earth, dust), meaning "being bound to the earth due to the intensity of destitution." The meaning is: "Or feeding an orphan from one's relatives, or an utterly helpless poor, at times of famine."

ثُمَّ كانَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَ تَواصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ وَ تَواصَوْا بِالْمَرْحَمَةِ ﴿١٧﴾

(90:17) ***while being one of those who have faith and who enjoin one another*** **(tawāṣaw, from tawāṣī)** ***to patience, and who enjoin one another to compassion*** **(marḥamah).**

Who enjoin one another to patience means those who prompt each other to be steadfast in obedience to God. *Who enjoin one another to compassion* means those who encourage each other to show compassion to those who are afflicted by need, poverty and misery.[1]

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is freeing a slave." (Ed.)

1 *Tawāṣī* means "mutual recommendation, urging one another." *Marḥamah*

This verse—*while being…*—is added to *ventured* (90:11). The implied meaning is: "Yet he did not venture the defile, nor was he one of those who have faith…" Exegetes have offered other views on this which are not worthy of discussion.

أُولٰئِكَ أَصْحابُ الْمَيْمَنَةِ ﴿١٨﴾

(90:18) ***Those are the people of good fortune*** **(al-maymanah).**

Maymanah here is synonymous with *yumn* (felicity, blessing, auspiciousness), which is the antonym of *shuʾm* (misery, misfortune, inauspiciousness). The demonstrative pronoun "Those" refers to the group described in the previous context. That is: "The above mentioned group—those who venture the defile, those who have faith, those who enjoin one another to patience and compassion—are people of good fortune. They shall reap the splendid fruits of their faith and righteous deeds. What awaits them is only bliss and blessings."

Some have said that *maymanah* is synonymous with the right side (*yamīn*), and the verse is about those who will receive their record of deeds in their right hand. This interpretation, however, is not consonant with the contrast between *maymanah* and *mashʾamah* (misery, misfortune, inauspiciousness).

وَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآياتِنا هُمْ أَصْحابُ الْمَشْأَمَةِ ﴿١٩﴾

(90:19) ***But those who defy Our signs, they are the people of misfortune*** **(al-mashʾamah).**

Apparently *Our signs* is meant in an unconditional sense, which can have a number of applications: (1) God's creational signs in the horizons (*āfāq*). (2) His internal signs within the souls (*anfus*). (3) The Noble Qur'an and its verses. (4) Any teaching that has been revealed to and propagated by God's messengers. These signs point to God's absolute oneness as a Lord and object of worship, and other implications and consequences which stem from this belief. Rejecting these signs means defying them, and defying them means defying God (*kufr*). *Mashʾamah* (misery, misfortune, inauspiciousness) is the antonym of *maymanah* (felicity, blessing,

(showing mercy) is a *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund) derived from *raḥmah* (mercy, compassion). (Auth.)

auspiciousness).

عَلَيْهِمْ نَارٌ مُؤْصَدَةٌ ﴿٢٠﴾

(90:20) ***[Imposed] upon them will be a closed*** **(muʾṣadah)** ***fire.***
Muʾṣadah means "locked, closed, shut."

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Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning *as you reside* (ḥill) *in this town* (90:2) it is said that *ḥill* here means *muḥill* (unrestricted, permitted), which is the opposite of *muḥrim* (forbidden, one who is in the state of *iḥrām*). It means that it is permissible for you to kill the disbelievers that you encounter. This pertains to the conquest of Mecca specifically, when God made it lawful for the Prophet to fight and kill.[1] The Messenger of God said, "This was not made lawful for anyone before me, and shall not be lawful for anyone after him. Even for me, it was lawful only for an hour of a day."[2]

(2) Imam al-Ṣādiq and Abū Muslim interpreted the same verses [90:1-2] as follows: I do not swear by this town since your sanctuary is violated, you are disrespected, and your honor is not maintained in this town. Thus there remains no sanctity for this town as your honor is not preserved.[3]

(3) *Majmaʿ al-bayān* says: The Quraysh tribe used to hold Mecca in honor, but they dishonored Muḥammad there. Thus God revealed: *I swear by this town, as you reside in this town* (90:1-2), meaning: They consider you to be lawful [to harass and harm] in this town; they deny and abuse you. They were such that if someone had murdered one's father, they would not arrest the person in Mecca. Furthermore, they were given security if they hung a plant from the *ḥaram* (sanctuary of Mecca) around their neck. Yet, with respect to God's Messenger, they considered things to be permissible that they never deemed permissible for anyone else. So God rebuked them for this.

(4) Concerning *By a father and what he begot* (90:4) Imam al-Ṣādiq

1 See Chapter 110's examination of narrations below, number 4. (Ed.)

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority Ibn ʿAbbās, Mujāhid and ʿAṭāʾ.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

said: It means Adam and what he begot in terms of prophets, their successors and their followers.[1]

Author's comment: The ideas in the above accounts are also found in Sunni narrations, without connecting to the Prophet (*mawqūf*). The last two are also reported by al-Qummī in his *Tafsīr*, without naming the Imam (*muḍmar*) and without a chain of narration (*mursal*).

(5) Concerning *He says, "I have squandered immense* (lubadan) *wealth"* (90:6) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *Lubad* means *mujtamaᶜ* (accumulated, amassed, gathered).

(6) It is said that this verse [90:6] pertains to al-Ḥārith b. Nawfal b. ᶜAbd Manāf. Once he committed a sin, then asked the Messenger of God [about atonement]. The Messenger of God ordered him to pay *kaffārah* (expiation, reparation, restitution). Then al-Ḥārith said, "I have lost all my wealth in expiations and donations since I converted to Muḥammad's religion."[2]

(7) Once Imam ᶜAlī was told, "Some people say that *and shown him the two paths* (90:10) refers to two breasts [of one's mother]." The Imam said, "No. They [*the two paths*] are good and evil [paths]."[3]

(8) Once Imam al-Ṣādiq was inquired about the verse, *and shown him the two paths* (90:10). He said: The paths of good and evil.[4]

(9) When Imam al-Riḍā wanted to eat, they would place a basin next to his table cloth. He would select the choicest of the food that he was served, would place a portion of that in the basin, and would send it to the poor. Then he would recite this verse: *Yet he has not ventured the defile* (90:11) and say: "God knew that not everyone is capable of freeing a slave, so He opened another way for them to paradise."[5]

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1 *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*.

2 *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*, on the authority Muqātil.

3 *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*.

4 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ḥamzah b. Muḥammad. The same idea is narrated from in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, through different chains of narration, from ᶜAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and from the Prophet, on the authority of Anas, Abū Umāmah and others. Al-Qummī has also reported it in his *Tafsīr*, without naming the Imam (*muḍmar*) and without a chain of narration (*mursal*).

5 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Jaᶜfar b. Khallād.

(10) Once a Bedouin came to the Prophet and said, "Messenger of God! Teach me an act that would get me into paradise."
"As much as your question is terse, your request is immense! First, *aʿtiq* (free, liberate, manumit) a soul. Second, *fakk* (free, liberate, manumit) a slave."
"Aren't they the same?" the man asked.
"No, the first is" the Prophet explained, "when you free a slave independently. The second is when you contribute to its price.
Third, return [with benevolence and forgiveness] to a relative who has wronged you.
If you are unable to do these, then give food to the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, enjoin good, and forbid evil. And if you cannot do these, then restrain your tongue unless it is a good speech.[1]

(11) Concerning *or a dust-ridden* (dhā matrabah) *needy* (90:16) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: That is one who has no protection or cover to intervene between them and dust (*turāb*).

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of al-Barrāʾ b. ʿĀzib, via an unconnected chain of transmission (*marfūʿ*).

Chapter 91

al-Shams (The Sun)

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Verses 1-15

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful.

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 15 verses. It explains that humans are hard-wired, through divine inspiration and teaching, to recognize virtue and vice. Their happiness depends on purifying their souls and fostering its growth by adorning themselves with Godwariness and cleansing themselves of wickedness. Otherwise, those who betray and neglect their soul will fail and be deprived of happiness. The chapter mentions the exterminating punishment that struck Thamūd when they denied their messenger Ṣāliḥ and slew his she-camel. The story is an indirect threat to the people of Mecca. The theme of the verses testifies that the chapter was revealed in Mecca.

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وَ الشَّمْسِ وَ ضُحاها ﴿١﴾

(91:1) ***By the sun and by her forenoon splendor* (ḍuḥāhā)*!***

Al-Mufradāt says: "*Ḍuḥá* means the spreading of sunshine and the unfolding of the day. It is also used for the forenoon, when this occurs." The pronoun "her" refers to *the sun*. The verse swears by the sun and by the extension of its light on the earth.

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وَ الْقَمَرِ إِذا تَلاها ﴿٢﴾

(91:2) ***By the moon when he follows her!***

The pronoun "her" refers to *the sun* (91:1).[1] The verse swears by the

1 The letter *wāw* (by, and) at the beginning of the verse adds a second vow to: *By the sun* (91:1). (Auth.)

moon as it follows the sun.[1] There are two possible meanings for this: (1) It signifies the moon taking its light from the sun, which is always applicable. (2) It signifies the moon rising after sunset, which would be applicable to the first half of the lunar month, from when it is a crescent until it becomes a full moon.

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وَ النَّهارِ إِذا جَلَّاها ﴿٣﴾

(91:3) ***By the day when it reveals her*** **(jallāhā, from tajliyah)*!***

Tajliyah means "manifesting, revealing." The pronoun "her" refers to the earth. The meaning is: "I swear by the day as it makes the earth visible to the eyes."

Here are some other suggested views about the pronouns in the verse:

(1) The pronoun "her" refers to *the sun* (91:1). The verse swears by the day's condition of revealing the sun, because it is with the unfolding of the day that the sun manifests.

Comment: This is incongruous with the first verse. It is rather the sun which manifests the day, not vice versa.

(2) The pronoun "her" refers to the world.

(3) The pronoun "her" refers to darkness.

(4) The pronoun "it" refers to God; the pronoun "her" refers to *the sun* (91:1). The meaning is: "I swear by the day, which is the time when God reveals the sun."

Comment: These are all unlikely interpretations.

وَ اللَّيْلِ إِذا يَغْشاها ﴿٤﴾

(91:4) ***By the night when it covers her*** **(yaghshāhā)*!***

Just like the last verse, the pronoun "her" in this verse refers to the earth, which is concealed by the night. Some have suggested that the pronoun "her" refers to *the sun* (91:1). This is not plausible because the night does not cover the sun. Rather, it covers the earth and the objects on it.

The verb *jallāhā* in the last verse is in the past tense, but the verb *yaghshāhā* in this verse is in the present tense. The verses are literally saying:

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1 In Arabic, the moon is masculine, while the sun is feminine. The correct English pronoun for both would be "it" but we have maintained the gender pronouns in the verses to avoid confusion. (Ed.)

"By the day when it revealed her. And by the night when it is covering her." This is a subtle reference to how were the state of affairs when the chapter was revealed, which was the early days of Islam's appearance. It alludes to how the earth was covered by the darkness of vice and transgression. As we have said before, there must be some connection between the oaths in a chapter and the message they serve. Not to mention that this way of expression maintains the rhyme of the final words of the surrounding verses.[1]

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وَ السَّماءِ وَ ما بَناها ﴿٥﴾ وَ الْأَرْضِ وَ ما طَحاها ﴿٦﴾

(91:5-6) *By the sky and by What* (mā) *built it! By the earth and by What* (mā) *spread it* (ṭaḥāhā, from ṭaḥw)*!*

Ṭaḥw means "stretching, extending." The word "What"—in *What built it* and *What spread it*—refers to God.[2] The usage of what (*mā*) instead of who (*man*) in these verses conveys a sense of ambiguity about the subject, which is a sign of glorification and wonder. The meaning is: "I swear by the sky and by the amazing force that built it! I swear by the earth and by the wondrous power which spread it!"

Some have suggested that the particle *mā* serves to turn the verb that follows it into a gerund (called *maṣdariyyah*). The meaning would be: "I swear by the sky and its building! I swear by the earth and its spreading!" However, this view is undermined by the other verses in the context, where we also read: *By the soul and by What fashioned it, then inspired it…* (91:7-8).

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وَ نَفْسٍ وَ ما سَوَّاها ﴿٧﴾

(91:7) *By the soul and by What fashioned it,*

The meaning is: "And I swear by the soul, and by that mighty, knowledgeable and wise source which fashioned it, designed its creation, organized its members, and balanced its faculties."

In the original Arabic, the word soul (*nafsin*) is in the indefinite form. Two suggested explanations for this usage are:

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1 Verses 91:2 and 91:4 are in the present tense, but verse 91:3 is in the past tense. This is in part to maintain the rhyme, since the present tense of the verb would be *yujallīhā*. (Ed.)

2 Hence, the particle *mā* is *mawṣūlah* (relative). (Auth.)

(1) It indicates that no specific soul is intended.
(2) It indicates glorification and aggrandizement.

Comment: The second view is more plausible, meaning: "By a soul that has such attributes and properties."

What is meant by *soul* here is the human soul in its absolute sense. Some have said that it refers to Adam's soul. However, this is implausible because there is no reason to restrict the meaning. It is also inconsonant with the context, especially with the verses: *delivered is one who fosters it, and defeated is one who lets it down.* (91:9-10), unless we take it as a form of *istikhdām* (amphibology).[1]

فَأَلْهَمَها فُجُورَها وَ تَقْواها ﴿٨﴾

(91:8) *then inspired it* (fa-alhamahā, from ilhām) *with [discernment between] its virtues* (taqwāhā) *and its vices* (fujūrahā):

According to al-Rāghib, *fujūr* means "rending the veil of piety." It is as though God's prohibition—about not committing a sin, or not neglecting an obligation—is a veil which is cast between the person and the act. If one commits the prohibited act, the person is effectively tearing that veil. *Taqwá* is defined by al-Rāghib as "placing oneself under protection from a threat." Since it is used here in contradistinction with *fujūr* (immorality, wickedness), it means "avoiding vice, restraining oneself from what is prohibited." It is interpreted in the narrations as *waraʿ* (restraint, abstinence) from what God has forbidden.[2]

Ilhām means "casting an idea in one's heart." That is when God imparts a mental image—either a concept (*taṣawwur*) or a statement (*taṣdīq*)—in one's soul. The verse says that God has inspired the human soul with virtue and vice, which are not external *actions*, but the *titles* and *categories* of actions. That is, the verse is not about God having taught the people the *physical form* of the acts, for that is common between vices and virtues. Rather, He has made them discern which act falls under which *category*.

1 In this case, *istikhdām* means that the word *soul* corresponds to Adam in the current verse, but the pronouns which refer to it in verses 91:9-10 correspond to the human soul in general. (Ed.)

2 What is central to *taqwá* is the element of abstinence and non-action. It is more about avoiding what is harmful than performing what is beneficial. Some have compared it to the brakes of a car. In terms of behavior, it is how one would walk in a field of thorns: with utmost mindfulness and prudence. (Ed.)

For instance, they know intuitively that consuming the property of orphans is a vice, but consuming one's own property is a virtue, even though both acts are the same in their external form. Similarly, the same act of sex can be a vice if it is extramarital, and virtue if its marital.[1]

Inspiring the human soul with vice and virtue means equipping it with practical reason (*al-ʿaql al-ʿamalī*). This is a continuation and complement of fashioning the soul. That is why the current verse is linked with the ending of the last verse with the letter *fāʾ* (so, then, therefore): *and by What fashioned it, then inspired it*. The fact that this inspiration is an element of God's creation is also reflected in the verse: *So set your heart on the religion as a people of pure faith, the origination of Allah according to which He originated humankind. There is no altering Allah's creation. That is the upright religion* (30:30).

The possessive pronoun "its"—in *its virtues and its vices*—shows that the verse is about virtues and vices that are specifically applicable to the above mentioned soul, which is the human soul. This is also applicable to the souls of jinn, since we can infer from the Qur'an that they too are subject to the religious obligation to believe and do righteous deeds.

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قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاها ﴿٩﴾ وَ قَدْ خابَ مَنْ دَسَّاها ﴿١٠﴾

(91:9-10) *delivered is one* (aflaḥa, from falāḥ) *who fosters it (zakkāhā, from tazkiyah), and defeated is one* (khāba, from khaybah) *who lets it down (*dassāhā, from tadassī).

Falāḥ means "winning what is desired, reaching the goal." *Khaybah* (failing, missing, losing) is its opposite. *Zakāh* is the "growth of a plant" in a proper and prosperous way. *Tazkiyah* is its transitive form, which means "making a plant to grow" in such a way. *Tadassī* is from the root *dass*, which

1 This is among many places in *al-Mīzān* where the author clearly holds the view that values are mental constructs and abstractions (sing. *iʿtbārī*). Good and bad, right and wrong, virtue and vice, saint and sinner—are all labels that our minds apply to events in the world of existence. Otherwise, the external reality is devoid of all value. This is not to say that values are arbitrary or baseless, but that they exist only in the human mind. For the same reason, from the point of view of God—that is, Absolute Being—there are no values, but things only *are*. See volume 14, pp. 79ff of the English translation, under "Ascription of Sins to God"; volume 15, pp. 51-77, under verses 7:10-25; volume 29, pp. 371-372, under verse 25:70. (Ed.)

means "inserting something in another thing surreptitiously, burying and concealing one thing in another." Given its contrast with *tazkiyah*, what is meant here is "raising and fostering something in a way that is against its natural disposition and how it is intended to grow." The first verse—*delivered is one…* (91:9)—is the complement of the oaths in the previous verses. The second verse continues that, as indicated by the conjunction *wāw* (and) at its beginning: *and defeated is one…* (91:10).

These two verses are about either ruining one's soul or setting it right. "Letting down" and "fostering" are used in accordance with the last verse: *then inspired it with [discernment between] its virtues and its vices* (91:8). The verse implies that the human soul is intuitively equipped with a distinguishing perception between vice and virtue. That is part of what makes the soul's creation perfect. Thus the soul realizes—through its *fiṭrah* (primal nature, innate disposition, pristine conscience)—that the right course of action] is submission to God's will: *Indeed, with Allah religion is submission* (3:19). Accordingly, adorning the soul with virtue and Godwariness would foster it and make it grow in a proper way. That is the best provision for the human soul, as God says: *And take provision, for indeed the best provision is Godwariness. So be wary of Me, O you who possess intellects* (2:197). But if the soul is immersed in vice and wickedness, then that is contrary to its healthy growth.

كَذَّبَتْ ثَمُودُ بِطَغْوَاهَا ﴿١١﴾

(91:11) ***The [people of] Thamūd denied [Allah's signs] out of their rebellion*** **(bi-ṭaghwāhā),**

From this verse until the end of the sūrah is evidence and reaffirmation for the previous verses: *delivered is one who fosters it…* (91:9-10).[1]

إِذِ انْبَعَثَ أَشْقَاهَا ﴿١٢﴾

(91:12) ***when the most wretched of them rose up.***

The word *when* indicates the time of either *denied* (91:11) or *their*

1 *Ṭaghwá* is synonymous with *ṭughyān* (rebellion, transgression, exceeding); both are *maṣdars* (infinitive nouns, gerunds). The letter *bāʾ* indicates *sababiyyah* (causality or instrumentality). (Auth.)
The meaning is: "They denied the truth *because of* exceeding the limits, *through* their rebellion, or *by means of* their transgression." (Ed.)

rebellion (91:11). *The most wretched* of Thamūd was the person who hamstrung the she-camel. His name was Qudār b. Sālif, according to the narrations. He was instigated by his people, as we can infer from the use of plural pronouns in the following verses.

فَقالَ لَهُمْ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ناقَةَ اللَّهِ وَ سُقْياها ﴿١٣﴾

(91:13) ***But then the messenger of Allah said to them, "[Watch] Allah's she-camel, and let her drink"***

The messenger of Allah was Ṣāliḥ, who was the prophet of the tribe Thamūd.[1] The meaning is: "Coming with a message from God, Ṣāliḥ told them, 'Beware of God's she-camel and let her drink. Do not bother her by killing her or impeding her from drinking water.'" God has elaborated this story in Sūrah Hūd and other chapters.[2]

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَعَقَرُوها فَدَمْدَمَ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّهُمْ بِذَنْبِهِمْ فَسَوَّاها ﴿١٤﴾

(91:14) ***But they rejected him and then hamstrung her*** **(fa-ʿqarūha, from ʿaqr).** ***So their Lord obliterated*** **(fa-damdama)** ***them by night because of their sin, and leveled it.***

ʿAqr means "striking something at its root." It is used for slaughtering or killing a camel. *Damdamah* means "falling, crushing, collapsing." For instance, it is used when one closes a grave. What is meant here is enveloping them with punishment in a way that it exterminates their progeny and effaces all their signs due to their sins.

… and leveled it **(fa-sawwāhā, from taswiyah)***:* There are three possibilities here for the feminine pronoun "it": (1) Apparently it refers to Thamūd, in the sense that they were a *qabīlah* (tribe, clan) [which is feminine]. The meaning would be: "God razed Thamūd [that is, their town] to the ground." (2) It refers to the earth. The meaning would be: "God made the land uniform and smooth as He removed every structure on it." (3)

1 The word *yawma* is *manṣūb* in terms of inflection (in the accusative form) because it is an object of an omitted imperative verb which conveys warning (*taḥdhīr*). *Let it drink* is also part of Ṣāliḥ's speech, as it is connected to the last part with the conjunction *wāw* (and). (Auth.)

2 See verses 11:61-68, 54:23-31. See volume 15, pp. 276ff of the English translation, under verses 7:73-79; and volume 30, pp. 88ff, under verses 26:141-159. (Ed.)

Some have suggested that it refers to God's act of obliteration. The meaning would be: "God administered His obliteration to them equally and without any discrimination, whether they were strong, weak, old or young."[1]

وَ لا يَخافُ عُقْباها ﴿١٥﴾

(91:15) ***And He does not fear its outcome.***

The pronoun "its" may refer to either "obliteration" or "leveling" in the last verse.[2] The meaning is: "God is not concerned with the aftermath of obliterating and leveling them—unlike the kings and people of authority who fear a comeback or backlash from their enemies." This is because all affairs end as God wills, according to His plan. Therefore, the verse is comparable in meaning to the verse: *He is not questioned concerning what He does, but they are questioned* (21:23).

Two other suggested views are:

(1) The pronoun "he" refers to *the most wretched* (91:12). The meaning is: "The person who hamstrung the she-camel did not fear the consequence of his deed."

(2) The pronoun "he" refers to Ṣāliḥ [91:13], and the pronoun "its" refers to obliteration [91:14]. The meaning is: "Ṣāliḥ did not fear the outcome of the obliteration because he was confident about his delivery."

Comment: The implausibility of both views should be clear.

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning *By the soul and by What fashioned it* (sawwāhā) (91:7) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: [*Sawwāhā* means] created and shaped it.

(2) said concerning *then inspired it with [discernment between] its virtues and its vices* (91:8): He clarified for it what it should do and what it should avoid. *Delivered is one who fosters it* (91:9): Delivered is one who obeys. *And defeated is one who lets it down*

1 *Taswiyah* has two main meanings: "leveling" and "equating." The first two interpretations are based on the first meaning; the third one is based on the second meaning. (Ed.)

2 There are two possible functions for the conjunction "And" (*wāw*) at the beginning of this verse: (1) It introduces a new statement. (2) It means "while." (Auth.)

(91:10): Defeated is one who disobeys.[1]

(3) Once a man asked, "O Messenger of God! Would you say that what the people are doing and toiling for today [in this life] is something that has been decreed and predestined for them? And what about how they respond to their prophets, which closes God's argument against them?"
"It is all preordained for them," he replied.
"Then why should they act?" the man inquired.
"When God creates one for either of the two ends [that is, paradise or hell], He also equips them with the action for that end. This is confirmed in God's Book: *By the soul and by What fashioned it, then inspired it with [discernment between] its virtues and its vices* (91:7-8).[2]

Author's comment: The man's, question, "Then why should they act?" means: "What is the meaning of their actions? In what sense are their actions attributable to them?" The Prophet's answer—"When God creates one…"—means that the occurrence of any action, whether virtuous or wicked, is *necessary* with respect to God's eternal decree and predestination. However, this necessity does not contravene the same act being *possible* with respect to the human being and their free will. We explained this point repeatedly in our previous discussion.[3]

(4) The Messenger of God recited the verse, *delivered is one who fosters it* (91:9) and said: Delivered is the soul that is fostered by God. And one who is let down by God fails to reach any good.[4]

Author's comment: While the two acts of *tazkiyah* (fostering,

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Zurārah, Humrān and Muḥammad ibn Muslim.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Aḥmad, Muslim, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, and Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of ʿImrān b. Ḥuṣayn.

3 See verses 80:20 and 81:29 above, and verse 111:5 below. Also see volume 1, pp. 143 and 162ff of the English translation, under verses 2:21-25 and 2:26-27; volume 2, pp. 209ff and 271-272, under verses 2:153-157 and 2:164; volume 13, pp. 25ff and 81ff, under verses 6:9 and 6:35; volume 15, p. 65, under verses 7:10-25; volume 39, p. 160, under verse 74:56; p. 200, under verse 76:3; pp. 233-234 under verse 76:30. (Ed.)

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Abū al-Shaykh, Ibn Mardawayh and Daylamī on the authority of Juwaybir, on the authority of al-Ḍaḥḥāk, on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās.

purifying) and *takhyīb* (letting down, betraying) can be ascribed to God, they can also be ascribed to the person's obedience and disobedience. One ascription does not preclude the other. It should be noted that leading astray and acts of the same nature are attributable to God only as a punishment [following one's misdeeds], as He says: *He leads no one astray thereby except the transgressors* (2:26).

(5) Once the Messenger of God asked ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, "Who was the *the most wretched* (91:12) of the earlier generations?"
"The man who hamstrung the she-camel [of Ṣāliḥ]."
"That is right," the Prophet confirmed. "And who is the most wretched of the later generations?"
"I do not know, O Messenger of God!"
"That is the person who will strike you here," said the Prophet, while pointing to the crown of ʿAlī's head.[1]

(6) The Prophet said, "O ʿAlī! *The most wretched* (91:12) of the earlier generations was the one who hamstrung the she-camel [of Ṣāliḥ]. And the most wretched of the later generations is your murderer." Another version says: "the one who will dye this" [pointing to ʿAlī's beard] "with this" [pointing to ʿAlī's head].[2]

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, which says: "This is an authentic narration, with its chain of narration tracing to ʿUthmān b. Ṣuḥayb, on the authority of his father." The book has also narrated the same idea on the authority of ʿAmmār b. Yāsir.

2 *Tafsīr al-burhān*, narrating from the following sources: (1) Al-Thaʿlabī and al-Wāḥidī, via their chains of narration, on the authority of ʿAmmār, ʿUthmān b. Ṣuḥayb and al-Ḍaḥḥāk. (2) Ibn Mardawayh, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Jābir b. Samurah, ʿAmmār, Ibn ʿAdī and al-Ḍaḥḥāk. (3) Al-Khaṭīb in his *al-Tārīkh*, on the authority of Jābir b. Samurah. (4) Al-Ṭabarānī and al-Mawṣilī. (5) Aḥmad, on the authority of al-Ḍaḥḥāk, on the authority of ʿAmmār.

Chapter 92

al-Layl (The Night)

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Verses 1-21

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 21 verses. The chapter's objective is to warn. It does this by pointing out the differences between people's striving. Some people spend their wealth [in the way of God], are conscious of God, and affirm what is good. Thus God will provide them with eternal happiness in the next life. Others are stingy, chase after wealth, and belie what is good. Thus, God will lead them to misery in the hereafter. The chapter places a special emphasis on financial charity [in the way of God].

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The sūrah could have been revealed either in Mecca or in Medina; its contents are appropriate for either.

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَغْشَىٰ ﴿١﴾

(92:1) ***By the night, when it covers!***

This verse is an oath: it swears by nighttime, as it veils the day. It is similar to the verse: *He makes the night cover the day* (7:54). What is covered by the night could be either the earth or the sun.

وَالنَّهَارِ إِذَا تَجَلَّىٰ ﴿٢﴾

(92:2) ***By the day, when it has appeared*** **(tajallā)*!***

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Tajallá means "the appearance of something after it has been hidden." *Night* is discussed in the present tense (*covers*), while *day* is discussed in the past tense (*has appeared*); we discussed the reason for this at the beginning

of the previous sūrah [under verse 91:4].[1]

وَمَا خَلَقَ الذَّكَرَ وَالأُنثَىٰ ﴿٣﴾

(92:3) ***By the One*** **(mā)** ***Who created the male and the female!***

The relative pronoun *mā* refers to the Almighty God. *Mā* (what) is used instead of *man* (who) to invoke a sense of ambiguity about the subject of discussion to give a sense of His grandeur. It means: "I swear by a wondrous thing—something that created the polarities of male and female in a single species!"[2]

Some exegetes have argued that the particle *mā* serves to turn the verb that follows it into a verbal noun (called *maṣdariyyah*). The meaning would be: "I swear by the creation of male and female." However, this is a weak interpretation.

The male and the female are meant in an unqualified sense, including any kind of male and female. Two other views held by some exegetes are:

(1) They refer to male and female humans specifically.

(2) They refer to Adam and his wife Eve.

Comment: What we said above is more plausible.

إِنَّ سَعْيَكُمْ لَشَتَّىٰ ﴿٤﴾

(92:4) ***Your efforts*** **(saʿyakum)** ***are diverse*** **(la-shattá).**

Saʿy (effort, endeavors, striving) means "walking fast." Here, it means one's actions in the sense that one deliberately strives and endeavors to perform them. *Shattá* (varied, diverse, dispersed) is the plural of *shatīt*, meaning "various."[3]

This sentence is the crux of the oath. It means: "I swear by the above mentioned aspects of creation, which vary in their nature and effects, that your endeavors are indeed varied, both in themselves and in terms of their

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1 The letter *wāw* (by, and) at the beginning of the verse adds a second vow to: *By the night* (92:1). (Auth.)

2 Like the last verse, this verse is also added to the initial vow: *By the night* (92:1). (Auth.)

3 Grammatically, *saʿy* is singular, but it takes on the meaning of a plural. *Shatīt* and *shattá* have the same form as *marīḍ* (an ill person) and *marḍá* (the ill). (Auth.)

consequence. Some of your endeavors involve giving, God-consciousness, and affirmation [of what is good, right, or true]. Others involve miserliness, avarice, and denying [what is good, right, or true]. Both have their own specific consequences."

فَأَمَّا مَن أَعْطَى وَاتَّقَىٰ ﴿٥﴾

(92:5) ***As for the one who gives and is wary [of Allah]***

This carries on from the discussion about the differing endeavors, and their different effects. Since "miserliness" [92:8] is used in this sūrah as an antonym to "giving," what is meant by "giving" is "spending wealth in the way of God," just as "miserliness" refers to "refusing to spend in the way of God." This is also indicated by the subsequent verse: *And his wealth will avail him not when he perishes* (92:11).

… and is wary [of Allah]: This serves as an interpretation of the previous part, clarifying that what is intended by "giving" is spending money according to religious commitment.

وَصَدَّقَ بِالْحُسْنَىٰ ﴿٦﴾

(92:6) ***and affirms the good*** **(bil-ḥusná),**

Ḥusná (good, better, best) is an adjective for an omitted noun. The implied meaning is: "affirms the good reward." That is, God has promised a reward for those who spend for His sake, which in turn requires confirming and believing in the resurrection. That itself necessitates believing in God's oneness as the sole Lord and deity, as well as believing in the divine messengers, for that is the path to attaining the divinely promised reward.

Together, these two verses speak of believing in God, His messengers, and the Last Day; spending wealth for the sake of God; and seeking the reward which He has promised through via the tongue of His messengers.

فَسَنُيَسِّرُهُ لِلْيُسْرَىٰ ﴿٧﴾

(92:7) ***We shall ease him*** **(fa-sa-nuyassiruhu)** ***into ease*** **(lil-yusrá, from taysīr).**

Taysīr means "preparation, arrangement," and *yusrá* means "the condition of things being easy, without hardship." Here, *yusrá* is used metaphorically, with two possible meanings:

(1) Such a person will be assisted by divine grace in performing good deeds, such that they find it easy to live righteously.
(2) Such a person will be prepared for eternal happiness and abiding in paradise with their Lord, because of the righteous deeds which they will have on their record.

The second view is more concordant with what the Qur'an promises.

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وَأَمَّا مَن بَخِلَ وَاسْتَغْنَىٰ ﴿٨﴾

(92:8) ***But as for the one who is miserly*** **(bakhila)** ***and avaricious*** **(istighná),**

Bukhl (miserliness, stinginess) is the antonym of *iʿṭāʾ* (giving, spending). *Istighnāʾ* means "seeking wealth through holding onto it and hoarding."

وَكَذَّبَ بِالْحُسْنَىٰ ﴿٩﴾

(92:9) ***and denies the good,***

Denying the good means "denying the goodly promise and divine reward which was imparted via the prophets and messengers." This effectively entails denying the resurrection.

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فَسَنُيَسِّرُهُ لِلْعُسْرَىٰ ﴿١٠﴾

(92:10) ***We shall ease him into hardship.***

This means leaving the person on their own without divine support. Such a person shall not be bolstered by God's grace in doing good deeds. Instead, good deeds will weigh heavily on them, and their breast shall not be expanded to embrace faith. Alternatively, it means that the person will be prepared for divine punishment.

وَمَا يُغْنِي عَنْهُ مَالُهُ إِذَا تَرَدَّىٰ ﴿١١﴾

(92:11)*: And his wealth shall not* **(mā)** ***avail him when he perishes*** **(taraddá).**

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Taraddī (perishing, tumbling, collapsing) means "falling from a high place." It is also used for death, destruction and perdition. Here, it can have three possible meanings: (1) the person's fall into the hole dug as their grave; (2) the person's collapse into hellfire; (3) the person's destruction.

There are two possible functions for the particle *mā* in this verse: (1) It is interrogative, meaning: "What part of their wealth will help them when they have died and fallen into perdition?" (2) It is negative, meaning: "None of their wealth will help them when they have died and fallen into perdition."

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إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا لَلْهُدَى ﴿١٢﴾

(92:12) ***Indeed upon Us rests guidance.***

This verse explains why God facilitates the journey of one group into ease, and that of the other into hardship, as stated above [92:5-11]. Alternatively, it clarifies why God is *stating* the above verses which outline His custom. The meaning is: "We ease the two parties—or We outline Our custom with respect to them—because doing so is part of guidance, and it is Our job to guide." Furthermore, "doing so is not a burden for Us, and nothing can impede it," as the next verse shows.

According to this verse, God shall certainly guide the people. He has made it an obligation upon Himself through the dictate of His wisdom. He has created people to serve Him, as He says: *I have not created the humans and the jinn except to serve Me* (56:56). He made the goal of their creation to serve Him, and made this the straight path toward Himself: *Allah is my Lord and your Lord. So serve Him; this is the straight path* (3:51, 19:36); *You guide to the straight path—the path of Allah* (42:52-53). He has taken it upon Himself to make the path clear and to guide the people to it—where guidance means *showing* them the way, whether they follow it or not: *It is upon Allah to show the right direction, and some [paths] go astray* (16:9); *Allah speaks the truth and guides to the [true] path* (33:4); *We have guided him to the path, be he grateful or ungrateful* (76:3).

Of course, this does not preclude others—such as the prophets—to also guide the people to the straight path by God's leave. He says [to Prophet Muḥammad]: *You guide to a straight path* (42:52); *Say: "This is my path. I call to Allah with insight—I, and those who follow me"* (12:108). This matter was discussed previously, in our discussion on the intellectual proofs for why God points prophets.[1]

In this verse, guidance is meant in the sense of showing the way [which is exclusively God's prerogative]. There is yet a second sense of guidance,

1 See volume 3, pp. 156ff of the English translation, under verse 2:213. (Ed.)

which is taking a person to the desired goal.[1] Here, the goal would be a wholesome worldly life or a felicitous afterlife, which are the good outcomes of following divine guidance and cladding one's self in servitude. It is obvious that such guidance is a creational phenomenon which belongs to God only. God has equally taken it upon Himself to bestow this form of guidance, as promised in His Book: *Whoever follows My guidance shall neither stray nor fall into misery* (20:123); *Whoever acts righteously, be they male or female, while being a believer—We shall make them live a goodly life, and shall reward them for the best of what they did* (16:97); *As for those who believe and do righteous deeds—We shall bring them into gardens with rivers flowing beneath them, to abide therein forever more. A promise of Allah, in truth! Who speaks more truly than Allah?* (4:122).

Although this [second] meaning of guidance is primarily attributed to God, it can still be carried out by others as intermediaries and subordinates between Him and His creation, by His will.

Hence, there are two possible meanings for the verse: (1) If "guidance" is taken to mean "showing the way," the verse means: "We are giving you these instructions because they pertain to the path of servitude, and it is Our responsibility to show you this path." (2) If "guidance" is taken to mean "taking a person to the desired goal," it means: "We make it easy for them to perform righteous deeds—or to enjoy an easy eternal life and enter paradise—because this is how they are brought toward their goal, and it is Our responsibility to take every being toward its perfection."

Easing the first group into ease [92:7] hinges on easing the second group into hardship [92:10].[2] This is according to God's words: *So that Allah may separate the foul from the wholesome, and stack the foul atop each other, and abandon them all in hell* (8:37). Even concerning the Qur'an, which is a guidance for all humankind, God says: *What We send down of the Qur'an is healing and mercy for the believers, but it only increases the wrongdoers in loss* (17:82).

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1 In the first type of guidance, reaching the destination remains a potentiality that is yet to be achieved. It is like giving someone directions on how to get somewhere. In the second type of guidance, that potentiality is actualized. It is like taking one's hand and walking them on the path, or driving them to where they need to get. (Ed.)

2 That is, they are concomitants, interdependent, and two sides of the same coin. One necessitates the other. (Ed.)

The verse could refer to guidance in an unconditional sense, including both God's legislative guidance [the first sense], as well as His creational and existential guidance [the second sense]. Indeed, the unqualified form of the word *guidance* in the verse implies an absolute sense of the term. Hence, both forms of guidance belong to God: (1) conventional guidance to the way: *We have guided them to the path, whether they be grateful or ungrateful* (76:3); (2) real guidance to the destination, as He says: *Who has given everything its form, then guided [it]* (20:50).

وَإِنَّ لَنَا لَلْآخِرَةَ وَالأُولَى ﴿١٣﴾

(92:13) ***And Ours is the afterlife and the prior.***

This verse refers to two stages or realms: that of instantiation and that of returning. Everything that can be called a "thing" is a property of God in the truest sense of ownership: its existence is upheld by its Lord, who is *al-Qayyūm* (the All-Upright, the Upholder). Since He is the only real owner of anything, it follows that He is also the only conventional or legislative owner of all things. In fact, it is based on *His* ownership that He has allowed other beings to own, control and manipulate things.

So He owns all things in all ways. Nothing, other than Him, owns anything. No one can block, impede, or overcome Him in this. Thus He says: *Allah judges; none repeals His judgment* (13:41); *Allah's command overrules* (12:21); *Allah does what He wills* (14:27).

فَأَنذَرْتُكُمْ نَارًا تَلَظَّى ﴿١٤﴾

(92:14) ***So I have warned you*** **(fa-andhartukum)** ***of a blazing fire*** **(talaẓẓá).**

The letter *fāʾ* (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of this verse shows that this is a conclusion to the previous discussion. In other words: "Since *Indeed upon Us rests guidance* (92:12), therefore *I have warned you* of about the fire of hell." This should also clarify the reason for the shift from the first person plural in the last verse to the first person singular in this verse. Since God has ordained and decreed that there must be guidance, it follows that He is the true and primary warner, although He delivers that warning through the channel of His Messenger.

Talaẓẓī means the "flaming and flaring" of a fire. The *blazing fire* in this verse refers to the fire of hell, as God says: *Never! Indeed it is a blazing*

fire (laẓá)*!* (70:15).

لَا يَصْلَاهَا إِلَّا الْأَشْقَى ﴿١٥﴾ الَّذِي كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّى ﴿١٦﴾

(92:15-16) ***None shall enter it*** **(yaṣlāhā, from ṣaly)** ***except the most wretched who denies [the truth] and turns away.***

The most wretched are all disbelievers who deny and turn away [from the truth and God's message]. This is meant in a comparative sense [not in the superlative]: it is relative to anyone who experiences misery in this world. Those who suffer in their health, wealth, or children are miserable, as well as those who lose out on their afterlife. However, the second group are far more wretched than the first, because in worldly suffering there is always the possibility of termination and the hope of relief in the near future. On the contrary, otherworldly suffering means eternal damnation.

Hence, *the most wretched* are the disbelievers who deny the true call and oppose it, as is shown by the second verse: *who denies [the truth] and turns away* (92:16). This interpretation is also supported by the unqualified form of "warning" in the last verse: *I have warned you* (92:14). Saying that *the most wretched* refers only to "the most wretched person ever" is not supported by the context of the verse.

Ṣaly means "being perpetually bound and attached" to the fire. Therefore, it amounts to eternal burning. This is part of what God has decreed for the disbeliever: *Those who disbelieve and deny Our signs—they shall be the inhabitants of the fire, abiding therein forever* (2:39).

According to some exegetes, this verse—*none shall enter it except the most wretched*—implies that corrupt believers will not go to hell. However, our interpretation of *ṣaly* (entering, abiding) refutes this idea, because the verse only restricts *eternal* torment to the most wretched disbelievers. Otherwise, other people may also enter hellfire [impermanently].

وَسَيُجَنَّبُهَا الْأَتْقَى ﴿١٧﴾

(92:17) ***But the wariest [of Allah] shall be distanced from it*** **(sa-yujannibuhā, from tajanīb)*:***

Tajnīb is synonymous with *tabʿīd* (distancing someone from something). The "it" in *distanced from it* refers to the *fire* (92:14). It means: "Those who are conscious of God will be far from the fire."

The wariest is meant in comparison to other forms of wariness and

caution. Some people are very protective of their life against dying or being killed. Other people are protective of their possessions. Others are careful to guard themselves from poverty and financial loss by clinging to their wealth. Still others are cautious of God, and spend their wealth because of their Godwariness [92:18]. The highest form of prudence and regard among them is holding God in high regard, and spending for His sake. Those are the most awake. Alternatively, one could say that these people are alert lest they lose out on the hereafter, so they purify themselves through giving. Based on this, *the wariest* in this verse is specifically compared to anyone whose wariness does not result or manifest in giving away their wealth, even if they may be wary with respect to worldly dangers, or wary of God through performing *other* righteous deeds.

Given our interpretation, this verse has a general meaning and is not restricted to a specific situation or individual. This can be confirmed by the next verses—*the one who gives his wealth, seeking purification…* (92:18ff)—which all provide general descriptions. Nevertheless, it is still possible that these verses—or the entire chapter—were revealed in reference to a specific circumstance, as mentioned in some narrations.[1]

We cannot hold that *the wariest* in this verse is meant in comparison to all other people, whether good or bad. If so, *the wariest* would be limited to one individual ever, or at least one specific individual in each era. The meaning would then be: "The wariest person [of God] to ever have lived shall evade it." Similarly, the previous verse would mean: "Only the most wretched human being in history shall burn in hell." However, the verses at the outset of the sūrah do not support this; nor does the general warning above: *so I have warned you of a blazing fire* (92:14). This would be meaningless, for it would be saying: "I have warned you all about a fire that only one of you will abide in it, and only one of you will escape."

الَّذِى يُؤْتِى مَالَهُ يَتَزَكَّى ﴿١٨﴾

(92:18) *the one who gives his wealth, seeking purification,*

This verse describes *the wariest [of Allah]* (92:17) as being those who give away their wealth so that they might grow wholesomely.

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1 This is based on one of the principles of the author in Qur'anic exegesis: The context of revelation of a verse does not restrict its general meaning and application. (Ed.)

وَمَا لِأَحَدٍ عِندَهُ مِن نِّعْمَةٍ تُجْزَى ﴿١٩﴾

(92:19) ***and it is not that anyone has any favor over him to be compensated*** **(tujzá),**

This verse reiterates the previous verse. It means: "These people do not feel indebted to others; they give not because they are obliged to pay back for a favor that someone has done for them. Rather, they give solely for the sake of God." This is affirmed by the next verse: *Other than seeking the face of his Lord, the Most Sublime* (92:20).[1]

إِلاَّ ابْتِغَاء وَجْهِ رَبِّهِ الأَعْلَى ﴿٢٠﴾

(92:20) ***other than seeking the face of his Lord, the Most Sublime,***

This verse acts as an unconnected exception.[2] It means: "Rather, he gives away his wealth, seeking the face of his Lord, the Most Sublime." We already discussed the meaning of God's *face*, as well as His *Most Sublime* name.[3]

وَلَسَوْفَ يَرْضَىٰ ﴿٢١﴾

(92:21) ***and he shall soon be pleased.***

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1 What is meant by "compensated" (*tujzá*) is "compensated with it" (*tujzá bihi*), but the preposition "with it" is omitted to maintain the rhyme of the verses. This refutes the suggested view that the passive verb *tujzá* (compensated, rewarded) is used because no particular subject is intended here [as indicated by the word *anyone*]. (Auth.)
In the author's interpretation, the passive voice indicates the ambiguity—and thus the inclusiveness—of *any favor whatsoever*. The meaning would be: "No one has any favor over the wary person so that the wary person may compensate them for their favor with his act of benevolence."
In the suggested view, the passive voice indicates the ambiguity—and inclusiveness—of *any benefactor whatsoever*. The meaning would be: "No one has rewarded him a favor."
The difference between the two meanings is not significant, and predominantly linguistic. (Ed.)

2 For unconnected exception, see the first footnote under verse 84:25 above. (Ed.)

3 For God's face, see volume 13, pp. 126-128 of the English translation, under verse 6:52. For His Most Sublime name, see verse 87:1 above. (Ed.)

This means that those who are *the wariest [of Allah]* (92:17) will soon be pleased with the bounteous reward that their Most Sublime Lord will give them. By mentioning these two divine attributes—*his Lord, the Most Sublime* (92:20)—the verses show that their recompense will be the highest and most precious reward, in accordance to God's lordship and sublimity. It also explains the transition in the last verse, from referring to God in the first person singular to the third person: the transition is meant to describe Him with these two attributes: *his Lord, the Most Sublime* (92:20).

Examining Narrations

(1) Muḥammad b. Muslim said: Once I asked Imam al-Bāqir about [the vows in] *By the night, when it covers* (92:21), *By the star when it sets* (53:1) and similar verses. He said: The Almighty God may swear upon His creation as He wills, but His creation may not swear by anything other than Him.[1]

(2) Regarding *By the night, when it covers* (92:1) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: It means when the night covers the day. This is an oath.

(3) Concerning the revelation of this chapter Imam al-Riḍā said: A man had a palm tree in another man's land, and thus used to disturb the landowner.[2] The landowner complained to the Messenger of God, who summoned the palm owner and proposed: "Give me your palm tree in exchange for a palm tree in paradise."
The man refused. Then one of the Anṣār (Medinan Supporters) named Abū al-Daḥdāḥ heard of this, went to the palm owner and asked him to trade his palm tree for a plot of land, to which the man agreed. Then he [Abū al-Daḥdāḥ] went to the Messenger of God and said: "O Messenger of God! I have bartered my plot of land in exchange for so-and-so's palm tree."
"For that," the Messenger of God said, "you shall have a palm

1 *Al-Kāfī*, it is related via its chain of narration. This is also narrated from Imam al-Jawād in *Man lā yaḥḍuruhu al-faqīh*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿAlī b. Mahziyār.

2 Other narrations clarify that the two men were neighbors and the tree was in the tree owner's land, but some of its branches hung over the neighbor's walls. The disturbance was that he would climb his tree and invade his neighbor's privacy, would sometimes enter his neighbor's land to pick up the dates that had fallen, and would wrest the dates from the children's hands and mouths. (Ed.)

tree in paradise."

Thus God revealed to His Prophet: *And by the One Who created the male and the female! Your efforts are diverse. As for the one who gives*—that is, the palm tree—*and is wary [of Allah] and affirms the good*—that is, the offer of God's Messenger—*We shall ease him into ease… he perishes* (92:3-11).[1]

Author's comment: "The two sexes" is the Imam's interpretation for *the male and female* (92:3).[2]

(4) Concerning *the wariest [of Allah] shall be distanced from it* (92:17) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: That is Abū al-Daḥdāḥ.

Author's comment: The above are narrations through Shia chains of transmission, from the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt. The same story is narrated on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās with the following difference: The Anṣārī haggled with the owner of the palm tree over the tree, and eventually bought it in exchange for forty trees. Then, he gifted it to the Prophet, who in turn gave it to the owner of the house.[3] According to ʿAṭāʾ, the name of the Anṣārī was Abū al-Daḥdāḥ.[4]

There are some narrations in Sunni sources saying that the sūrah was revealed about Abū Bakr. Al-Rāzī says in *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*:

> Our [Sunni] exegetes concur that *the wariest [of Allah]* (92:17) refers to Abū Bakr. Know that Shias unanimously reject this narration, and say instead that the verse was revealed about the status of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. Their evidence for this is the verse: *and they give zakāt while bowing down* (5:55). Therefore, *the wariest [of Allah] who gives his wealth, seeking purification* (92:17-18) alludes to that verse which says: *and they*

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1 Al-Ḥimyarī, *Qurb al-isnād*, on the authority of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad, on the authority of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Abī Naṣr. This is also reported in *Tafsīr al-Qummī* without naming the Imam and without a chain of narration.

2 There is apparently a mistake here because the narration makes no mention of "the two sexes" (*al-zawjayn*). Perhaps the current verse was mixed with verse 75:39—*the two sexes, the male and the female*—by one of the transcribers or the author. (Ed.)

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of al-Wāḥidī, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿIkrimah.

4 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*. Al-Suyūṭī has also reported this story in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās, though he considers the [chain of] narration to be weak.

give zakāt while bowing down (5:55).

He [al-Rāzī] then interprets *the wariest [of Allah]* (92:17) as the best of people, meaning "a single individual who is the most conscious of God." We already discussed the problems with this interpretation. Concerning what he [al-Rāzī] has ascribed to all Shias: they reject the narration about Abū Bakr based on the authentic narration related by al-Ḥimyarī, which we quoted above [number 3], and other similar narrations which show that the verses were revealed about Abū al-Daḥdāḥ al-Anṣārī. However, there is no unanimity about the verses being about Imam ʿAlī, notwithstanding some weak accounts like the next one.

(5) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: *But the wariest [of Allah] shall be distanced from it* (92:17): This refers to the Messenger of God and those who follow him. And *the one who gives his wealth, seeking purification* (92:18): This refers to the Commander of the Faithful [Imam ʿAlī], as per the verse: *and they give zakāt while bowing down* (5:55). *And it is not that anyone has any favor over him to be compensated* (92:19): This refers to the Messenger of God, who was not indebted to anyone's favor, although *his* favor flows over to all of creation.[1]

Author's comment: This narration's chain of transmission is weak.[2] That aside, it certainly does not interpret the meaning of the verse (*tafsīr*), but only matches it with some application of it (*jary wa taṭbīq*). This is clearly reflected in matching the noun [*the wariest* (92:17)] with the Messenger of God, and the adjective of that noun [*the one who gives his wealth, seeking purification* (92:18)] with Imam ʿAlī. If that were an absolute exegesis and the primary meaning of the verses, the entire structure of the chapter would fall into disarray. This is assuming that the Imam said the word "And"—in "And *the one who gives his wealth*"—as part of his own words, not a part of the verse. If he said it as part of the verse, then the narration would be among those narrations that claim the Qur'an to have been distorted. Such narrations are not valid.

(6) Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Abī Naṣr said: I asked Imam al-Riḍā about the verse: *Indeed upon Us rests guidance* (92:14). He said: "God guides whomever He wills and leads astray whomever He wills."

"May God bless you!" I said. "Some of our companions believe

1 *Tafsīr al-burhān*, on the authority of al-Barqī, on the authority of Ismāʿīl b. Mihrān, on the authority of Ayman b. Muḥriz, on the authority of Abū Baṣīr.

2 Ayman b. Muḥriz is unidentified. (Auth.)

that true knowledge can be acquired: that if they ponder on it properly, they will reach it."

The Imam rejected that and said: "Then why don't they acquire this good for themselves? Everyone would like to be better than those who are better than them. Look at Banū Hāshim: Their position and their nearness [to the Prophet] is known. They are more befitting for this matter [the caliphate] than you. Do you think that they do not ponder for themselves? That you have understood but they haven't?"

[Then the Imam added:] "Imam al-Bāqir said: 'All people would have loved us, if they could.'"[1]

Author's comment: In this narration, *hidāyah* (guidance) is meant in the sense of "taking one to the desired destination." That is exclusively up to God to provide, for it is an element of His Lordship. Moreover, His *ḍalālah* (leading one astray, misguidance) is a punishment [subsequent to one's misdeeds and ungratefulness]. That is when He ceases to send down His mercy and does not provide guidance for a person. Since bestowing guidance can is ascribable to God, withholding it can also be attributed to Him. Otherwise, taking the initiative to lead one astray from the very beginning cannot be ascribed to God, the Almighty.

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1 Al-Ḥimyarī, *Qurb al-Isnād*, on the authority of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad.

Chapter 93

al-Ḍuḥá (The Forenoon)

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Verses 1-11

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

This sūrah was revealed in either Mecca or Medina, and consists of 11 verses. It is said that revelation to the Prophet ceased for a while, until people began to say: "His Lord has abandoned him." Then this sūrah was revealed to gladden his soul. The chapter's content is compatible with having been revealed in either Mecca or Medina.

وَالضُّحَىٰ ﴿١﴾ وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا سَجَىٰ ﴿٢﴾

(93:1-2) ***By the forenoon*** **(al-ḍuḥá)*! By the night when it settles*** **(sajá, from sajw).**

This is an oath. *Ḍuḥá* means "the spreading of sunlight and the stretching of the day," according to *al-Mufradāt*. Thus it is applied to that time of the day. When used for the night, *sajw* refers to "the stillness of the night as it is covered in darkness."

مَا وَدَّعَكَ رَبُّكَ وَمَا قَلَىٰ ﴿٣﴾

(93:3) ***Your Lord has not abandoned you*** **(waddaʿaka, from tawdīʿ),** ***nor is He displeased*** **(qalá).**

Tawdīʿ is synonymous with *tark* (abandoning, leaving, forsaking). The noun *qilá* means "dislike" or "extreme dislike." This verse is the crux of the vows [in 93:1-2]. The relevance between the interruption of revelation and the day-and-night imagery here should be evident.

وَلَلْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ لَّكَ مِنَ الْأُولَىٰ ﴿٤﴾

(93:4) ***And the afterlife is better for you than the prior.***

The previous verse implies that the Prophet is completely under the aegis of divine grace and honor. This verse adds to that and elevates his status further. It is effectively saying: "Your current status—where you enjoy God's grace and mercy—is as long as you live in this world. But your life in the hereafter will be even better for you than the life of this world."

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وَلَسَوْفَ يُعْطِيكَ رَبُّكَ فَتَرْضَىٰ ﴿٥﴾

(93:5) ***And your Lord shall soon give you such that you shall be pleased.***

This verse reiterates and confirms the last verse: *And the afterlife is better for you than the prior* (93:4). The verse does not qualify either God's giving, nor the Prophet's pleasure. Hence, it implies an unconditional gift, which results in absolute satisfaction. According to some exegetes, the verse refers to both this life and the afterlife, rather than only the afterlife.

أَلَمْ يَجِدْكَ يَتِيمًا فَآوَىٰ ﴿٦﴾

(93:6) ***Did He not find you an orphan*** **(yatīman)**, ***and shelter you?***

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This and the next two verses refer to some of God's great blessings upon the Prophet. His father had died before he was born. And he lost his mother when he was two.[1] Then, when he was eight years old, his grandfather, who was his guardian, died. Thereafter his uncle raised him.

Some exegetes have interpreted *yatīm* (orphan) as "unique, matchless." It means one who has no equal among the people, corresponding to the expression "peerless pearl" (*durr yatīm*). From this angle, the meaning would be: "Did He not find you unique among the people, so He inclined the people toward you and gathered them around you?"

وَوَجَدَكَ ضَالًّا فَهَدَىٰ ﴿٧﴾

(93:7) ***And He found you wandering*** **(ḍāllan, from ḍalāl)**, ***and guided you.***

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Ḍalāl (error, straying, misguidance) here means "being devoid of guidance." In and of himself, the Prophet was devoid of divine guidance. Neither

1 Most historians—including Ibn Hishām, al-Yaʿqūbī and al-Ḥalabī—have recorded six years old. (Ed.)

he nor any other human being can find guidance except through God. Viewed on his own, he was always lost and devoid of guidance; but taking God's grace into account, divine guidance was intertwined with his being from the moment he was created. In terms of meaning, this verse is similar to the verse: *You did not know what the Book is, nor what is faith* (42:52). It is also similar to the verse where God narrates from Prophet Moses: *I did that when I was astray* (26:20), meaning that he had not yet been guided with the guidance of prophethood.

Here are some other suggested views:

Ḍalāl here means "lack of knowledge," as used in the verse: *so that if one of the two errs* (taḍilla, from ḍalāl) *the other will remind her* (2:282)

Comment: This is close to our suggested interpretation, and can be confirmed by the verse: *indeed prior to it you were among those who are unaware [of it]* (12:3).

It means: "He found you lost among the people, in the sense that they were not aware of your position. So He guided and directed them toward you."

It refers to a historical account, when the Prophet, as a child, got lost on the way to Mecca. He was traveling from the countryside with his nurse Ḥalīmah b. Abī Dhuʾayb, to his grandfather ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib.

It refers to a historical account, when he was a child and got lost in the valleys of Mecca.

It refers to a time when he got lost on a journey to Syria with his uncle Abū Ṭālib, in a caravan belonging to Maysarah, the servant of Khadījah.

Comment: There are other opinions as well, but they are all evidently weak.

وَوَجَدَكَ عَائِلا فَأَغْنَى ﴿٨﴾

(93:8) *And He found you needy* (ʿāʾilan)*, and made you free from need?*

ʿĀʾil means "a poor person, one without any wealth." The Prophet had been poor and did not have any property. Then God enriched him through marriage with Khadījah b. Khuwaylid, who was extremely wealthy. She offered him her wealth. Some exegetes say that *made you free from need* means "answered your prayers."

فَأَمَّا الْيَتِيمَ فَلا تَقْهَرْ ﴿٩﴾

(93:9) *So as for the orphan, do not belittle him* (taqhar, from qahr).

Al-Rāghib says:

Qahr means to simultaneously: (1) dominate someone; and (2) humiliate them. It is also used for only one of them.

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وَأَمَّا السَّائِلَ فَلَا تَنْهَرْ ﴿١٠﴾

(93:10) *As for the beggar, do not repel him harshly* (tanhar, from nahr).

Nahr means "to repulse and turn away someone roughly."

وَأَمَّا بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ فَحَدِّثْ ﴿١١﴾

(93:11) *And as for the blessings of your Lord, proclaim them.*

Proclaiming a blessing is either to speak about it, or to manifest it through one's action. This amounts to gratitude for that blessing. These three verses [93:9-11] are universal commands for all people, even though they are addressed to the Prophet. They stem from the previous three verses [93:6-8] which recalled the blessings of God upon the Prophet. They are effectively saying: "You have indeed tasted what it means to be an orphan: humiliated and heartbroken. So do not belittle any orphan or their property. You have tasted the bitterness of a wandering person's need for guidance, and a poor person's need for sufficiency. So do not turn away a seeker who turns to you in need—whether in need of guidance or in need of daily bread. You have experienced many blessings which your Lord has bestowed upon you through His generosity, grace and mercy. So thank Him for His blessings by manifesting them, and do not conceal them."

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Examining Narrations

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(1) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *By the forenoon* (93:1): That is when the sun rises in the sky. *And by the night when it settles* (93:2): That is when it gets dark. *Nor is He displeased* (93:3): He is not angry with you [or He does not dislike you].

(2) The Messenger of God said: We are a household for whom God has chosen the hereafter over this life: *And your Lord shall soon*

give you such that you shall be pleased (93:5).[1]

(3) The Messenger of God went to Fāṭimah when she was grinding flour with a mill, and was wearing a [coarse] garment made of camel hair. When he saw her, he said: "O Fāṭimah, hasten and gulp bitterness in this world for bliss in the hereafter tomorrow." Then God revealed: *and your Lord shall soon give you such that you shall be pleased* (93:5).[2]

Author's comment: This narration is compatible with two possibilities: (1) The verse [93:5] may have been revealed separately and after the previous parts of the sūrah, then appended to them. (2) The verse was revealed a second time independently.

(4) Ḥarb b. Shurayḥ said: I asked Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn [Imam al-Bāqir]: "This concept of intercession which the people of Iraq speak about [or narrate], is it true?"

"Yes, by God," he confirmed. "my uncle Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyyah told me, narrating from ʿAlī, that the Messenger of God said: 'I shall intercede for my nation until My Lord asks: "Are you content, O Muḥammad?" and I say: "Yes, my Lord, I am content."'"

Then he [Imam al-Bāqir] turned to me and asked: "You people of Iraq deem the most promising verse of the Book of God to be: *O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed Allah will forgive all sins* (39:53).

"Indeed we hold that."

"But we, the Prophet's Household, say that the most promising verse in the Book of God is: *And your Lord shall soon give you such that you shall be pleased* (93:5), referring to intercession."[3]

(5) In an audience with al-Maʾmūn, Imam al-Riḍā said: "*Did He not find you an orphan, and shelter you?* (93:6). That is, did he not find you alone, then incline the people toward you? *And did He not*

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Shaybah, on the authority of Ibn Masʿūd.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-ʿAskarī's *al-Mawaʿiẓ*, Ibn Laʾāl and Ibn al-Najjār, on the authority of Jābir b. ʿAbd-Allāh.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Mardawayh and Abū Nuʿaym's *al-Ḥilyah*.

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find you wandering?—that is, unrecognized among your people—*and guide you?* (93:7). That is, did He not guide the people so that they come to know you? *And He found you needy, and made you needless?* (93:8). That is, He made you free from need by granting your supplications."

Al-Maʾmūn said: "May God bless you, O son of God's Messenger!"[1]

(6) A man from Basra said: I saw al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī and ʿAbd-Allāh b. ʿUmar circling the House [Kaʿbah]. I asked Ibn ʿUmar about *and as for the blessings of your Lord, proclaim them* (93:11). He said: "He [the Prophet] is commanded to speak of what God had blessed him with."

Then I asked al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlī about *and as for the blessings of your Lord, proclaim them* (93:11). He said: "He [the Prophet] is commanded to speak of what God had blessed him with, with respect to His religion."[2]

(7) Regarding *and as for the blessings of your Lord, proclaim them* (93:11) [Imam] al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī said: When something good comes to you, tell your brethren about it.[3]

(8) The Prophet said: Whoever is granted a benefit and remembers it has given thanks for it, and whoever conceals it has been ungrateful for it. If one pretends to have something [a quality or property] that they do not have, they are like one who puts on a garb of deceit.[4]

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1 *Tafsīr al-burhān*, on the authority of Ibn Bābawayh, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ibn al-Jahm.

2 *Tafsīr al-burhān*, on the authority of al-Barqī, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿAmr b. Abī Naṣr.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Bayhaqī.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr,* it on the authority Jābir b. ʿAbd-Allāh.

Chapter 94

al-Inshirāḥ (The Expansion)

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Verses 1-8

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

This sūrah was revealed in either Mecca or Medina, and consists of 8 verses. It begins by mentioning God's favor upon the Prophet, and then commands him to strive hard in the way of God and ardently seek Him. The sūrah could either be Meccan or Medinan, although the context better suits the Meccan chapters.

Some narrations from the Imams say that Sūrah al-Ḍuḥá (Chapter 93) and Sūrah al-Inshirāḥ (Chapter 94) are a single sūrah. Al-Rāzī relates this claim from Ṭāwūs and ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, and then says:

> They have favored this view because the verse, *Did we not expand for you your breast?* (94:1) is almost a follow-up on the verse, *Did We not find you an orphan?* (93:6). However, this cannot be so, for Sūrah al-Ḍuḥá was revealed while the Prophet was distressed due to being harassed by those who rejected him. It was revealed at a time of trial, when his chest felt constricted. In contrast, Sūrah al-Inshirāḥ was revealed when the Prophet was in a state of expansion and elation. So how could these two chapters be connected?

The problem with al-Rāzī's view is that "expanding the Prophet's breast" does not mean "being in a state of expansion and elation." It means widening his breast so that it can accommodate the teachings and truths being revealed to him. The purpose, again, is that he would not feel constricted by the revelation, or by the way that people harass him when he spreads the message.

The connection between the two chapters can be corroborated by a narration where the Messenger of God says:

> I asked my Lord something that I wished I had not asked. I said: "O Lord, there were some prophets before me for whom You

subjugated the winds. And there were some who could bring the dead back to life."

He said: "Did I not find you an orphan, and shelter you?" [93:6].

"Yes."

"Did I not find you wandering, and guide you?" [93:7].

"Of course, my Lord."

"Did I not expand for you your breast and remove your burden?" [94:1-2].

"Yes, O Lord."[1]

More shall be said about this in our exposition of Sūrah Quraysh (Chapter 106), God-willing.

أَلَمْ نَشْرَحْ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ ۝١

(94:1) *Did We not expand for you* (nashraḥ, from sharḥ) *your breast?*

Al-Rāghib says:

The root meaning of *sharḥ* is to open meat and similar things. When one carves the meat, one says *sharaḥtu* or *sharraḥtuhu*. *Sharḥ al-ṣadr* (the expansion of the chest) is when one's breast opens up with divine light, tranquility from God, and comfort from Him. God says [narrating from Moses]: *O Lord! Expand for me my breast* (20:25). He also says: *Did We not expand for you your breast?* (94:1); *Whomever Allah expands their breast for…* (39:22).

The first three verses, in their arrangement as well as their content, correspond to the beginning, middle, and end of the Prophetic mission, respectively. This is confirmed by how these verses are justified: *Thus indeed with hardship comes ease* (94:5), which is then repeated. Then the last two verses draw a conclusion. Based on this analysis, "expanding the Prophet's breast" means giving him the capacity to encompass divine revelation and the travails associated with spreading the message among the people, as well as their harassment. In other words, it means that his sacred soul was fully prepared for accepting what God poured therein.

وَوَضَعْنَا عَنكَ وِزْرَكَ ۝٢ الَّذِى أَنقَضَ ظَهْرَكَ ۝٣

1 Ibn Abī Ḥātim, on the authority of Saʿīd b. Jubayr, on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās.

(94:2-3) *And lower your burden* (wizr), *which weighed down* (anqaḍa, from inqāḍ) *your back* (ẓahraka)?

Wizr means "a heavy load." *Inqāḍ al-ẓahr* means "breaking one's back" in a way that it makes a noise, much like when a heavy weight is placed on a bed or something similar. Here, it means having a very noticeable burden on one's back. "Removing the weight" means "taking away the *feeling* of being burdened."[1]

As we already explained [under the last verse], the context shows that "lowering or removing the burden" means aligning the chain of causes such that the Prophet succeeds in his mission and efforts. The weight he had to carry was the message that he brought, his call of the people, and consequences of that. God consigned this load to the Prophet only after expanding his breast.

There is an account where two angels descended upon the Prophet, split his chest open, took out his heart, washed it, and then put it back. Some exegetes have matched the "removal of burden" with this account. We will discuss this in our examination of narrations below.

Here are some other suggested opinions concerning *burden*:

(1) The inappropriate actions that the Prophet had done before his mission.
(2) His ignorance of the religious laws and teachings which had to be acquired through revelation and his inquiry.
(3) His bewilderment in the face of certain things, such as fulfilling the prophetic mission.
(4) Revelation and the weight that it initially placed upon him.
(5) Seeing his people going astray and facing their defiance, while being unable to guide them.
(6) The people going to extreme measures to oppose and persecute him.
(7) His grief at the loss of his uncle Abū Ṭālib and his wife Khadījah.
(8) Disobeying God, which makes the "lowering of burden" equivalent to infallibility.
(9) The sins of his nation, where "lowering " means forgiveness.

Comment: Some of these views are absurd and others are weak given the context of the verses. Some of them are narrated [from early exegetes

1 The conjunction "and" at the beginning of verse 94:2 shows that the verse conveys the same idea as the last verse: *Did We not expand…* (94:1). (Auth.)

and Companions], while others are mentioned as mere possibilities.

وَرَفَعْنَا لَكَ ذِكْرَكَ ﴿٤﴾

(94:4) ***And raise your fame?***

An elegant literary point here is the appearance of *raise* after *lower* (94:2). What is meant is elevating the Prophet's reputation above that of other people. God has indeed done this for the Prophet. One way He has done it is by placing the name of the Prophet next to His in the two testimonies of faith, which are the foundation of His religion. Every Muslim must mention the Prophet as well as his Lord in each of the five daily prayers.

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا ﴿٥﴾

(94:5) ***Thus indeed*** **(fa-inna)** ***with hardship*** **(al-ʿusr)** ***comes ease.***

This is likely a justification and explanation for of what was said previously about removing the Prophet's burden and elevating his name. The burden of the mission and the call to Islam—which are the heaviest burdens to bear for anyone—weighed heavily on the Prophet. Similarly, the people rejecting his call, disparaging him, and persisting to wipe out his name were burdensome on him. God eased that for him through inclining the people to accept his call; and elevated his name which they had sought to erase. This act of God was according to His ongoing custom of bringing ease after hardship. That is why in this verse He justifies His removal of the hardship from the Prophet by referring to His custom. And perhaps this can be matched with the law of impermanence: there is a constant flow of events, and everything is perpetually changing. For this reason, the definite article *al-* (the) in *al-ʿusr* [not translated in the English] indicates the genus of hardship in general (*jins*), not every hardship exhaustively (*istighrāq*).

According to al-Zamakhsharī, the verse's theme is to comfort the Prophet by giving him a good promise. He writes in *al-Kashshāf*:

> The polytheists used to taunt the Messenger of God and the believers for being poor and weak, until it crossed the Prophet's mind that they kept away from Islam because of the low financial and social status of its adherents. So God reminded him of His splendid blessings, and then said: *Thus indeed with hardship comes ease* (94:5). The effective meaning is: "We have bestowed upon you

all these blessings, so do not despair of God's grace, because the hardship that envelops you is accompanied by ease."[1]

His explanation implies two points: (1) The definite article (*al-*) in *al-ʿusr* indicates that the hardship in question is already known or introduced (*ʿahd*), as opposed to hardship in general (*jins*). (2) *Ease* here refers to the abundant war spoils that God bestowed upon the believers later on.

However, this interpretation is not acceptable due to the following reasons: (1) The Prophet's mind was sharp enough to realize the state of the people—that they were avoiding the call to Islam due to disdaining the truth and defiance against God. (2) The people did not incline toward Islam even after its triumph and the enrichment of the believers [by God]. (3) God had already made His prophet despair of the masses believing in his message: *The word has been realized against most of them; they shall not believe… It matters not whether you warn them or do not warn them; they shall not believe* (36:7-10); *As for the faithless, it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them, they will not have faith* (2:6). Verses 36:7-10 were revealed in Mecca, and verse 2:6 in Medina.

A more plausible alternative is interpreting "ease after hardship" as the triumph and elevation of Islam after its abasement, assuming that the sūrah is Meccan.

إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا ﴿٦﴾

(94:6) *Indeed with hardship* (al-ʿusr) *comes ease* (yusran).

This is repeated for emphasis and affirmation. Some have said: It is an independent statement, and the two verses imply that there are *two* eases for each hardship. This is based on a linguistic rule that when a definite noun is repeated [such as *al-ʿusr* (the hardship) in these verses], it refers to the same thing; however, it is the opposite for when an indefinite noun is repeated [such as *yusran* (an ease) in these verses]. For instance, when one says: "If you earn a coin, then spend *the* coin" (*fa-anfiq al-dirham*), the second coin is the same as the first. In contrast, when one says: "If you

1 He says that the letter *fāʾ* (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of the verse is *fāʾ al-faṣīḥah* (indicative, revelatory, clarifying). (Auth.)
See the footnote under verse 79:20 for *fāʾ al-faṣīḥah*. The implied meaning is: "Now, if it is it is true that We expanded your breast and lifted your burden from your back, then it is also true that with hardship there comes ease." (Ed.)

earn a coin, then spend *a* coin" (*fa-anfiq dirhaman*), the second coin is not necessarily the same as the first. Nevertheless, this rule is not universal.[1]

فَإِذَا فَرَغْتَ فَانصَبْ ﴿٧﴾ وَإِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَارْغَبْ ﴿٨﴾

(94:7-8) ***So when* (fa-idhā)** ***you are free, exert yourself, and ardently seek your Lord.***

These verses are addressed to the Prophet. The previous verses described how God has imposed the religious call and mission on the Prophet, has favored him by expanding his breast, has removed his burden and has elevated his fame—all of which indicate ease after hardship. Then the instructions in these verses are drawn as a conclusion to that discussion, shown by the letter *fā*ʾ (so, then, therefore) at the beginning verse 94:7.

The meaning is: "Since ease comes after hardship, which is in the hands of God and none other, then whenever you have fulfilled your obligations [and you have some free time], exert yourself in His way through worship and prayer. Ardently strive toward Him so that He may bless you with rest which is embedded in exhaustion, and the ease which is latent in hardship."

Other suggested meanings are:

(1) Exert yourself in doing recommended acts after completing the obligatory ones.

(2) Recite supplication (*duʿāʾ*) after you finish the ritual prayer (*ṣalāh*).

Comment: These are specific applications of the verses' general purport.

(3) When you have returned from battle, exert yourself in worship.

(4) When you have finished dealing with worldly matters, strive for your hereafter.

Comment: There are other views as well, but they are implausible.

Examining Narrations

(1) Once Abū Hurayrah asked: "O Messenger of God! What was your first prophetic experience?"
Sitting up, the Prophet said, "You have indeed asked me a

1 The indefinite form of the word *yusran* (ease) implies "some type of ease"; it does not emphasize the magnitude of *ease*, as some exegetes have preferred. The preposition "with" (*maʿa*) here indicates sequence, not simultaneity. (Auth.)

significant question, Abā Hurayrah. When I was twenty years and some months old, I was in the desert when I heard a voice above me. It was a man, saying to another man: 'Is that him?' Then they approached me.

I had never seen anything like their face, scent or clothes among the people. As they reached me, each one clasped one of my arms, but I could not feel either of them touching me!

One of them said: 'Lie him down.' So they lay me down with neither confinement nor a bent. One said: 'Split open his breast.' His partner grasped my breast and opened it, but I saw no blood and felt no pain. The first one said: 'Remove any rancor or envy.' The other one extracted something shaped like a leech, then tossed it away. The first one said: 'Insert loving-kindness and compassion,' and the second one put in something silvery. Then he tugged on the big toe of my right foot and said: 'Go ahead in peace!'

So I left with that, and came to feel loving-kindness toward the youngsters and compassion toward the elderly."[1]

Author's comment: There are several versions of this story. Some versions—as in *Rūḥ al-maʿānī*—say that he was ten years old. Some narrations link the story to the descent of Sūrah al-ʿAlaq (Chapter 96). Some narrations—as in *al-Bukhārī*, *Muslim*, *al-Tirmidhī*, and *al-Nasāʾī*—connect it with the Prophet's nocturnal journey (*isrāʾ*). In any case, there is no problem in accepting this story allegorically, describing a form of *tamaththul* (appearance, resemblance, representation). Some scholars have undertaken great pains to interpret it literally. There is no point in addressing them since such interpretations are unfounded at their core.

(2) The Messenger of God said: Once Gabriel came to me and said: "Your Lord says: 'Do you know how I have elevated your fame [94:4]?'"

I said: "God knows best."

He said [relating from God]: "Whenever I am remembered, you are remembered with Me."[2]

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd-Allāh b. Aḥmad's *Zawāʾid al-zuhd*, on the authority of Ubayy b. Kaʿb.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Abū Yaʿlá, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn Ḥabbān, Ibn Mardawayh and Abū Nuʿaym's *al-Dalāʾil*, on the authority of Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī.

(3) One day the Prophet was seen smiling with joy and saying: A single difficulty will never triumph over two eases. *Thus indeed with hardship comes ease. Indeed with hardship comes ease* (94:5-6).[1]

(4) Concerning *So when you are free, exert yourself, and ardently seek your Lord* (94:7-8) Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq said: It means when you have completed the obligatory prayer (*ṣalāh*) then strive toward your Lord with supplication (*duʿāʾ*), and ardently seek Him through request."[2]

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd al-Razzāq, Ibn Jurayr, al-Ḥākim and al-Bayhaqī, on the authority of al-Ḥasan [Baṣrī].

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

Chapter 95

al-Tīn (The Fig)

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Verses 1-8

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 8 verses. It reminds the audience of the resurrection and divine retribution through charting the path of humankind. They are initially created in the ideal form, but then they differ with respect to whether or not they remain faithful to their pristine nature. Some depart from it and degenerate into the lowest of the low. Divine wisdom necessitates distinguishing between the consequence that each group will meet.

This chapter is likely Meccan given the verse: *And by this secure land* (95:3). However, that is not explicit. Therefore, it could also be Medinan, having been revealed after the Prophet's migration, at a time when he was back to Mecca.

وَالتِّينِ وَالزَّيْتُونِ ﴿١﴾ وَطُورِ سِينِينَ ﴿٢﴾ وَهَٰذَا الْبَلَدِ الْأَمِينِ ﴿٣﴾

(95:1-3)*: By the fig and by the olive! By Mount Sinai! By this* (hādhā) *secure* (al-amīn) *land!*

There are several views regarding what *the fig* and *the olive* refer to:

(1) They refer to the two conventional fruits. God swears by them because of their abundant benefits and unique properties.
(2) They refer to the fig tree and the olive tree, respectively.
(3) *The fig* refers to the mountain that Damascus was built upon, and *the olive* refers to the mountain that Jerusalem was built upon [Mount Zion].

Comment: Perhaps the mountains are referred to by these two trees because they grow there. And perhaps they are being sworn by because they were the provenance of a large number of prophets. There is more

to the list.

By Mount Sinai! Mount Sinai is the mountain where God spoke with Prophet Moses, son of Amram (ʿImrān). It is called both Sīnīn [95:2] and Saynāʾ [23:20].

By this* (hādhā) *secure* (al-amīn) *land! This refers to the Holy Mecca, for its neighborhood has specifically been ordained as a sanctuary (haram). God says: *Have they not seen that We have appointed a safe sanctuary?* (29:67). God also narrates Prophet Abraham's supplications: *My Lord, make this a secure land* (2:126); *My Lord, make this land a sanctuary* (14:35).

The demonstrative pronoun "this" (*hādhā*) implies personification of the land, which is a way of exalting its status. There are two possible interpretations for the adjective *secure*:

(1) It means securing. It is a land which is possessed of security.[1]

(2) It means secured. It is a town where people are secure and safe by other people's attacks. Hence, using *secure* as an adjective for the *land* is figurative.[2]

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ ﴿٤﴾

(95:4) *We have certainly created the human being in* (fī) *the fairest stature* (taqwīm).

This is the complement of the oaths in the previous verses. The preposition "in" (*fī*) indicates that *the best form* contains all aspects of human existence. *Taqwīm* means "giving *qiwām*" to something, and *qiwām* means a basis or structure by which something can stand firmly. *The human being* refers to the human species as a genus. It means that the human archetype is created with an excellent structure.

The next verses—*Then We relegated them to the lowest of the low…* (95:5-6)—clarify that having the fairest stature and structure in this verse refers to the human *capacity*. By the virtue of their creation they can rise to the highest record, win eternal happiness with their Lord, and be saved

1 Here *amīn* is an active participial noun (*ism al-fāʿil*) and can be compared to *lābin* (milkman) and *tāmir* (seller of dates). (Auth.)

2 Here the verbal pattern *faʿīl* is equivalent to *mafʿūl* (passive participial noun, accusative case). (Auth.)
More specifically, this is *mafʿūl fīhi*, which is the place where a verb occurs. (Ed.)

from damnation. God has equipped them with beneficial knowledge, and has enabled them to act righteously, as He says: *By the soul and by What fashioned it, then inspired it with [discernment between] its virtues and its vices* (91:7-8). If humans have faith in what they know and persist in righteous deeds, God will uplift them, as He says: *To Him ascends the good word, and He elevates righteous conduct* (35:10); *Rather it is your Godwariness that reaches Him* (22:37); *Allah will raise those of you who believe and those who have been given knowledge in rank* (58:11); *for such shall be the highest ranks* (20:75). There are other similar verses which show how humans can be elevated through faith and righteous actions, as a perpetual gift from God. God calls this gift a reward: *they shall have an unfailing reward* (95:6).

ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ ۝٥

(95:5) *Then We relegated them* (radadnāhu, from radd) *to the lowest* (asfala) *of the low.*

Apparently *radd* is used in its usual meaning (rejecting, reducing, returning). *The lowest of the low* refers to the most degenerate condition: the worst of those who have lost out and plunged into wretchedness. It means: "We then lower the human being to the lowest position among the people enduring divine punishment."[1]

Two other possibilities are: (1) *Radd* is equivalent to *jaʿl* (making, turning, placing). The meaning would be: "We make them the lowest of the low." (2) *Radd* is equivalent to *taghyīr* (changing, transforming). The meaning would be: "We change the human being to a state of having the lowest position." In either case, the meaning of "lowliness" would be misery and punishment.[2]

Here are some other suggested views on the verse:

(1) Being created *in the fairest stature* (95:4) refers to one's youth, when one is strong, healthy and handsome. Then relegating them *to the lowest of the low* refers to becoming old and decrepit, where one loses both inner and outer strength. Thus one's creation

1 The word *asfala* is *manṣūb* in in terms of inflection due to the omission of a particle that assigns the oblique case (called *nazʿ al-khāfiḍ*). (Auth.)
In this case, the omitted particle is *ilá* (to, toward). (Ed.)

2 In these two interpretations, there is no omitted particle. (Ed.)

degenerates, as God says: *And whomever We give a long life, We cause him to regress in creation* (36:68).

(2) *The human being* (95:4) only refers to the unfaithful, and being relegated *to the lowest of the low* speaks of that person's descent into hellfire.

(3) Being relegated *to the lowest of the low* signifies the deterioration of one's health through aging, and the exception in the next verse is an unconnected one.[1]

Comment: Apparently the exception in the next verse—*except for those who believe and do righteous deeds* (95:6)—is connected to the content of the current verse. For all people grow old, whether they are believers or disbelievers, virtuous or vicious. Saying that the believers—or the righteous believers—are exempted from that is an unwarranted claim.

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَلَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ ﴿٦﴾

(95:6) ***Except those who believe and do righteous deeds—then they shall have an unfailing*** **(ghayr mamnūn)** ***reward.***

Ghayr mamnūn is synonymous with *ghayr maqtūᶜ* (uninterrupted, unceasing, not cut off). This is a connected exception that is applied to the *human being* (95:4) as a genus.[2]

… then they shall have **(fa-lahum)** ***an unfailing reward:*** This is a consequence of their belief and righteous deeds, indicated by the letter *fāʾ* (so, then, therefore). This confirms, through contrast, the view that *the lowest of the low* (95:5) means misery and divine punishment.

فَمَا يُكَذِّبُكَ بَعْدُ بِالدِّينِ ﴿٧﴾

(95:7) ***So what*** **(fa-mā)** ***would make you deny retribution*** **(bil-dīn)*****?***

This verse speaks to the human species as a genus. Some exegetes say that it is addressed to the Prophet, but intended for others. The particle *mā* (what) introduces a rhetorical question that indicates rebuke. *Retribution* is the object which one is led to deny, and it means God's recompense in

1 See the first footnote under verse 84:25 above for unconnected exception. (Ed.)

2 This means that not all humans are relegated to the lowest of the low. Rather, humankind, as a species, are divided into two groups: one group falls to the lowest pits of hell; the other rises to an unfailing reward. (Ed.)

the hereafter. The meaning offered by the exegetes is: "Given that We have put human beings into two groups—one which degenerates into abasement, and one which shall enjoy eternal reward—what would make you deny God's retribution on the Day of Resurrection?"[1]

أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِأَحْكَمِ الْحَاكِمِينَ ﴿٨﴾

(95:8) *Is not Allah the most decisive of judges* (aḥkam al-ḥākimīn, from ḥukm)*?*

This is a rhetorical question for the sake of affirmation. By referring to God as *the most decisive of judges*, it affirms that God is above all other judges in having the most accurate, solid and irrevocable verdict, which is unimpeded by uncertainty, weakness or annulment. Both in His initial creation of the people and the subsequent management their affairs, He rules over them in the firmest, most excellent and most penetrating way, as required by His infinite wisdom.[2] If God is *the most decisive of judges*, and human beings are in two different groups with respect to their beliefs and acts, then divine wisdom necessitates that these two groups be distinguished in their eternal life, which will be upon the resurrection.

This should clarify the significance of the letter *fā*ʾ (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of the last verse: *So what* (fa-mā) *would make you deny retribution?* (95:7). It shows that the verse is the conclusion of God's argument, the proof for which is to be found in the verses before it [95:4-6] and the verse after it [95:8]. The premises of the argument are: (1) People are created with the best structure. (2) They then split into two groups, one group departing from their fair stature and crumbling into the lowest of the low, while the other remaining steadfast on their robust structure and pristine nature. (3) God, Who is in charge of directing their affairs, is the wisest of judges. His decisive wisdom decrees that the two groups must differ in their retribution. Given these premises, the conclusion is: Thus, there will be a day on which each group is recompensed for what it did, and there is no justification for denying it.

1 The author will offer his own interpretation under the next verse. (Ed.)

2 *Aḥkam* can mean both "firmest" and "wisest." Its addition to *al-ḥākimīn* (judges, rulers) shows that the first meaning is intended. Nevertheless, some of the author's discussions here are based on the sense of wisdom implied by the term. (Ed.)

As one can see, the message of these verses is similar to the following: *Shall We treat those who believe and do righteous deeds like those who cause corruption on the earth? Shall We treat the Godwary like the vicious?* (38:28); *Do those who have perpetrated misdeeds suppose that We shall treat them as those who believe and do righteous deeds, their life and death being equal? Evil is the judgement that they make* (45:21).

Some exegetes have held that the last verse—*So what would make you…* (95:7)—is addressed to the Prophet, where *mā* (what) means *man* (who), and *ḥukm* in the current verse means "judgment, rule, verdict." Therefore, the meaning would be: "Since people are divided into these two groups, they must be distinguished by their retribution on the Promised Day. Given this, who would accuse you of lying about the judgment? Is not God the best judge? So He shall indeed judge between you and those who charge you with being a liar in your claims about the retribution." As one can see, this interpretation suffers from unnecessary contrivance.

Examining Narrations

(1) Regarding *By the fig and by the olive! By Mount Sinai! By this secure land* (95:1-3) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *The fig* is Medina. *The olive* is Jerusalem. *Mount Sinai* is Kūfah. *This secure land* is Mecca.

Author's comment: This is also found in a narration from the Prophet via Imam al-Kāẓim. However, there is some problem with this interpretation.

(2) It is narrated that *the fig* and *the olive* (95:1) are al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn [respectively]; *Mount Sinai* (95:2) is ʿAlī; and the *secure land* (95:3) is the Prophet.

Author's comment: Such narrations are irrelevant to the apparent and primary meaning of the verse (called *tafsīr*).

(3) Once the Prophet was asked about the *secure land* (95:3). He said: It is Mecca.[1]

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Jābir b. ʿAbd-Allāh, on the authority of Khuzaymat b. Thābit, not al-Anṣārī.

Chapter 96

al-ʿAlaq (The Clot)

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Verses 1-19

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 19 verses. It orders the Prophet to receive the Qur'an from God through revelation. This is the first sūrah of the Qur'an that was revealed. According to the context of the verses, it could have been revealed all at once, as we shall discuss. It is incontrovertibly Meccan.

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِى خَلَقَ ۝١

(96:1) ***Read*** **(iqraʾ, from qirāʾah),** ***in the name of your Lord*** **(bi-ism rabbika)** ***Who created.***

Al-Rāghib says:

> *Qirāʾah* means "assembling the letters and words as one recites." It is not used for all types of assembling. For instance, if one gathers a group of people, one would not use the verb *qaraʾtu*. Likewise, one does not use the verb for uttering a single letter.

In any case, there are three usages for the term: (1) "I read the book" (*qaraʾtu al-kitāb*) is used when its letters and words are gathered together in the reader's mind, even if the reader does not speak them aloud. (2) "I recited it" (*qaraʾtuhu*) is used when the letters and words are assembled together through speech. (3) "I read it to him" (*qaraʾtuhu ʿalayhi*) is used when the letters and words are merged in someone's hearing. The word *tilāwah* (recitation) can also be used for this meaning, as in the verse: *A messenger from Allah, reciting* (yatlū) *pure scriptures* (98:2).

Here, *iqraʾ* seems to be used in the first sense: It is a command to receive the Qur'an from the angel of revelation. The sentence is a command to read the book, even though it is also part of the book, just as someone might

write in the beginning of a letter, "Read my missive, and act according to it." This would be a command to read the letter, while at the same time it is a part of the letter. We can deduce two points from this general theme. First, these were the first verses of the Qur'an that were revealed to the Prophet, as mentioned in some narrations. Second, the implied meaning is: "Read the Qur'an" or something similar [where the object of reading is omitted]. Hence, the following views should be discarded:

(1) The verse is a general command to read, without any specific object of recitation.

(2) The object of reading is *the name of your Lord*, and the letter *bāʾ* (by, with, in) is *zāʾidah* (extra, supplementary, semantically empty). The implied meaning is: "Recite the name of your Lord." In other words, "Recite the phrase: *In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful*.

(3) What is meant is "Read to the people," where the people is omitted.

Comment: While the third view is not applicable to this verse in particular, it is correct otherwise, as one of the objectives of the Qur'an's revelation: *A Qur'an which We have revealed in portions so that you may read it to the people by slow degrees, and We have revealed it, revealing in portions* (17:106).

In the name of your Lord: There is an implied omitted word before this phrase, such as "opening" or "beginning."[1] It could also be that the letter *bāʾ* indicates *mulābasah* (coverage, connectedness, company).[2] There is no conflict between *In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful* being at the beginning of the sūrah, and also a part of it. God opens the chapter with this phrase, and then orders His Prophet to also begin his reading with it. This would be a case of teaching through action, and can be compared to God's command to say "God-willing" in the verse: *And do not say about anything, "I will do it tomorrow" without [adding] "if Allah wills"* (18:23-24). The reader should reflect on this.

Your Lord Who created: This alludes to the fact that lordship is restricted to God. This is monotheism with respect to lordship (*rubūbiyyah*), which means ruling over the beings and directing their affairs. God's unity of

1 The meaning would be: "Read, while opening or beginning your recitation with the name of your Lord." (Ed.)

2 The meaning would be: "Read, while your recitation is covered with and accompanied by the name of your Lord." (Ed.)

lordship in turn requires that only He be worshiped. The polytheists used to say that God only created things, but others—such as angels, jinns and certain humans—were responsible for managing the creation. God refutes this by saying *your Lord Who created*. Hence, the verse explicitly states that lordship and creation both belong to God alone.

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خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ﴿٢﴾

(96:2) *He Created man* (al-insān) *from a clot of blood* (ʿalaq).

What is meant by *al-insān* is the human species as a genus. *ʿAlaq* is "dried blood." It refers to what the sperm turns into in the womb.

This verse refers to the divine oversight over human beings, from the time a person is but a clot of blood until they become a full-fledged human, with wondrous properties and acts that are mind-boggling. This person would never reach this state of completion and perfection[1] were it not for God's successive management of their affairs, which amounts to incessant acts of creation on the person, one on top of another. Therefore, God is the Lord of human beings, just as He is their Creator. It thus follows that humans have none to take as a lord but He. This verse also proves God's unity of lordship.

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اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ﴿٣﴾

(96:3): *Read, and your Lord is the most gracious,*

According to the context, and given the unqualified form of the word *Read*, the verse reiterates and emphasizes the first command [96:1]. Two other views are:

(1) This verse commands reading *to the people*, which means propagating the message, while the first verse commands the Prophet to read for himself.

(2) Both commands instruct the Prophet to read to the people.

Comment: Neither view accords with the apparent meaning of the verses.

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… Your Lord is the most gracious: God's grace surpasses that of others

1 Completion (*tamām*) means the attainment of all components. Perfection (*kamāl*) means the actualization of all potentials. They can be matched with quantity and quality, respectively. (Ed.)

because of two points: (1) His giving is prior to the recipient's merits and qualifications. (2) Any gift or blessing ultimately traces to Him as its original giver.

الَّذِى عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ﴿٤﴾

(96:4) *Who taught by the pen* (bil-qalam)

The meaning is: "He taught reading—or reading and writing—through the intermediary of the pen."[1] These words are meant to strengthen the soul of the Prophet and remove any worry or confusion that might have set in when he was ordered to *Read* (96:1, 96:3) for he was unlettered and did not read or write. It is as if the verse is saying: "Read the book of your Lord Who reveals it to you. And do not fear! Your most gracious Lord is the One Who taught humans to read through the pen that is used for writing. He can teach you how to read this book even though you are unlettered. He would not have ordered you if He had not enabled you to carry it out."

عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ ﴿٥﴾

(96:5): *He taught man* (al-insān) *what he knew not.*

This verse shows how the blessings of God are more general than what was mentioned above, with reference to how God has taught humankind what they did not know. This also is meant to strengthen the heart of the Prophet and gladden his soul.

According to the context, *al-insān* apparently means humankind as a genus. Others have suggested:

(1) It refers to Adam.
(2) It refers to Idrīs (Enoch), because he was the first to write with a pen.
(3) It refers to all prophets who used to write.

Comment: These are unfounded views that do not spring to the mind from the text.

1 The letter *bā*ʾ (by, with) shows causality. This verse is either a new statement, independent from the last verse; or it describes the state of the affairs pertaining to the last verse (called *ḥāliyyah*). (Auth.)
In the second case the meaning would be: "Your Lord orders you to read *while* He taught by the pen." (Ed.)

كَلَّا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَيَطْغَىٰ ﴿٦﴾

(96:6) ***Nay*** **(kallā)*****! Indeed man transgresses***

The exclamation *kallā* (nay, never, no way) rejects an implied notion in the previous verses. It means: "God has bestowed great blessings upon humankind, such as teaching them by the pen, other forms of knowledge, and teachings through revelation. Therefore, people must thank Him for these blessings, but they are not grateful; they transgress."

… Indeed man transgresses: Humans cross their limits and boundaries. This verse refers to a natural inclination in the humans, as reflected in the verse: *Indeed man is most unfair and ungrateful* (14:34)

أَنْ رَآهُ اسْتَغْنَىٰ ﴿٧﴾

(96:7) ***for he views*** **(raʾāhu)** ***himself self-sufficient.***

The verb in this verse is derived from the word *raʾy* (view, opinion), not from *ruʾyah* (vision, sight) in its physical sense. Both the subject and object of this verb are *al-insān* (man, the human being; 96:5-6).

This verse—*for he views himself self-sufficient*—explains why *man transgresses* (96:6). Humans tend to be rebellious because they believe that they are needless of their Lord. They do not recognize the blessings that He bestows upon them, and thus act ungratefully. This is because they get caught up with their limited selves and the material instruments which they seek in order to reach their goals. Therefore, they are diverted from their Lord and do not see any need of Him which might impel them to remember Him or thank Him for His blessings. They transgress because they are not mindful of their Lord.

إِنَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ الرُّجْعَىٰ ﴿٨﴾

(96:8) ***Indeed toward your Lord is the return*** **(al-rujʿá).**

Rujʿá is synonymous with *rujūʿ* (return, returning). Given the context of threat in the following verses, what is meant here is apparently a warning about death and resurrection. The verse is addressed to the Prophet. Some have said that it is addressed to the human being, shifting from the third person to the second person in order to intensify the threat. However, the first view is more apparent.

أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يَنْهَىٰ ﴿٩﴾ عَبْدًا إِذَا صَلَّىٰ ﴿١٠﴾ أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَانَ عَلَى الْهُدَىٰ ﴿١١﴾ أَوْ أَمَرَ بِالتَّقْوَىٰ ﴿١٢﴾ أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّىٰ ﴿١٣﴾ أَلَمْ يَعْلَمْ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَرَىٰ ﴿١٤﴾

(96:9-14) ***Have you seen the one who forbids a servant when he prays? Have you seen if he were upon guidance, or called to Godwariness? Do you see if he denies and turns away, does he not know that God is seeing?***

These verses provide some examples for the transgression of humankind. They also set the stage for the following verses, which warn the people of the consequences of transgression, and order the Prophet to not obey such transgressors, but to serve God instead.

… a servant when he prays: It can be gleaned from the rest of the verses that this refers to the Prophet, as he is forbidden below from obeying the person who opposes his prayer, and is commanded to prostrate and draw closer to God instead. Assuming that this sūrah was the first to be revealed, and that it was revealed all at once, the verses imply that the Prophet used to pray before the Qur'an was revealed. This, in turn, acts as proof for his being a prophet before being formally commissioned with the Qur'an.

Objection: Some have pointed out that the ritual prayer (*ṣalāh*) was not mandated at the beginning of the Prophet's mission. Instead, according to some narrations, it was ordained on the night of his ascension to the heavens. This is reflected in the verse: *Stand in prayer from the setting of the sun until the darkness of the night, and the dawn recitation* (17:78).

Response: The only definite conclusion of this point is that the five daily prayers *in their current form* of cycles of even units (sing. *rakʿah*) were legislated and established on the night of ascension. However, there is no evidence that no ritual prayer was mandated beforehand. Many Meccan chapters—including those revealed before Sūrah al-Isrāʾ (17), such as al-Muddaththir (74) and al-Muzzammil (73)—speak of the ritual prayer (*al-ṣalāh*) using various expressions. They do not say *how* the prayer was performed, apart from including some recitation of the Qur'an and prostration. Some narrations say that in the early days of the prophetic mission, the Prophet used to pray with Khadījah and ʿAlī, although the narrations do not say how they prayed.

Have you seen…: This expression is equivalent to "tell me" (*akhbirnī*).

It is a rhetorical question that conveys surprise. The expression takes two objects, where the first object is the person who is being observed and reported on. This is *the one who forbids* (96:9) in the first and third cases [96:9, 96:13]. In the second case [96:11], the first object of this expression is *a servant* (96:10). In all three instances, the second object is: *does he not know that Allah is seeing?* (96:14).

The effective meaning can be divided into three segments: "(1) Tell me about the person who forbids another servant from praying, while the one who is forbidding knows that God sees their actions. What shall be their condition? [96:9-10]. (2) Tell me about the one who is forbidding this: What if this servant who is praying is truly guided or calls to piety? What will happen to the one who is forbidding this, especially since they know that God is seeing? [96:11-12]. (3) Tell me about the one forbidding this: They have committed the offense of denying the truth and refraining from believing in it. And they have forbidden the praying servant from his prayer, while they know that God is present. What does such a person deserve, other than punishment? [96:13]."

In order to keep the pronouns consistent, some have suggested that the first object of *Have you seen?* (96:9, 96:11, 96:13) in each instance is a pronoun which refers to *the one who forbids* (96:9).

If so, the meaning would be: "Tell me about the person who is forbidding this. If the forbidder is indeed on the path of guidance and calls to piety, what is the appropriate thing for them to do and command? And what kind of end can they expect when they are forbidding the worship of God?"[1]

This interpretation is unlikely. There is no problem if the pronouns in these verses refer to more than one individual as long as they are indicated by textual and contextual clues.

… does he not know that God is seeing?: What is meant by "knowing" here is having the necessary prerequisites to know this. Believing that God has created all things necessitates believing that God knows all things, even though the person may be oblivious to it. The person forbidding the prayer was an idol-worshiper and a polytheist. The idol-worshipers believed that

1 In this interpretation, all pronouns in the verses refer to the person who was trying to stop the Prophet from praying. The verses condemn the person for inconsistency: "Forbidding prayer cannot be an application of guidance and piety. Therefore, if this person is committed to guidance and piety, they are defeating their own principles by forbidding prayer." (Ed.)

God is the Creator of all things, and viewed Him to be free from all defects. Therefore, they acknowledged that He would not be ignorant of anything, would not be powerless to do anything, and so on.

كَلَّا لَئِنْ لَمْ يَنْتَهِ لَنَسْفَعًا بِالنَّاصِيَةِ ﴿١٥﴾ نَاصِيَةٍ كَاذِبَةٍ خَاطِئَةٍ ﴿١٦﴾

(96:15-16) ***Nay! If he does not cease, We shall seize him*** **(la-nasfaʿan, from safʿ)** ***by the forelock, a lying, sinful forelock!***

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> *Safʿ* means "grasping powerfully." The phrase *safʿatu bil-shayʾ* means "I took hold of it" or "I grabbed it strongly."

Describing the *forelock* as *lying* and *sinful* is metaphorical, referring to the *possessor* of the forelock. This verse conveys a vehement threat and rejection. It means: "It is not as this person imagines or intends. Alternatively: The person has no right to do so. I swear, if they do not desist from forbidding the prayer, and do not change their course of action, We shall seize them by the forehead, humiliated and debased. And We will drag to the fire the forehead of that person who was a denier in speech and sinful in action."

Another suggested interpretation is: "We shall burn their forehead and blacken it with the fire."

فَلْيَدْعُ نَادِيَهُ ﴿١٧﴾ سَنَدْعُ الزَّبَانِيَةَ ﴿١٨﴾

(96:17-18) ***Then let him call out his comrades*** **(nādiyah).** ***We [too] shall call the keepers of hell*** **(al-zabāniyah).**

Nādī means "a gathering." Apparently what is meant here is "the people at a gathering, those who have gathered around." It is also defined as "a companion." *Al-Zabāniyah* are "the guardian angels of hell." Some say that it means "sentry, patrol." The imperative form of the first verse is a condescending command meant to render the person helpless and show their weakness. It reflects the severity with which this person will be taken. The meaning is: "Let this person who is forbidding worship call all of his friends to save him from Us. Then We will call the harsh and fierce guardians of hell, against whom the help of no helper is effective."

كَلَّا لَا تُطِعْهُ وَاسْجُدْ وَاقْتَرِبْ ﴿١٩﴾

(96:19) ***Nay! Do not obey him, but prostrate and draw near*** **(iqtarib).**

The word *Nay* is repeated here to emphasize its previous case [96:15]. *Iqtirāb* means getting closer to God. Some have interpreted it as advancing toward God's reward.

… Do not obey him…: Do not obey the person who is forbidding you from prayer. Based on this, prostration here refers to the prayer. Perhaps the prayer at that time primarily involved glorifying God and prostrating to Him. Some exegetes say that prostration in this verse refers specifically to the obligatory prostration after reciting this sūrah, which is one of the four places in the Qur'an where such prostration is obligatory.

Examining Narrations

(1) ʿĀʾishah, the Mother of the Believers, said: The revelations to the Prophet of God began through accurate dreams in sleep. Any dream that he had was as clear to him as the daybreak.
Then he was inclined to solitude, so he used to seclude himself in the cave of Ḥirāʾ. He would worship there for several nights before returning to his family. He would take provisions for that, then return to Khadījah, then take more provisions for another round. This continued until the truth unveiled to him when he was in the cave of Ḥirāʾ. An angel came to him and said: "Read!"
"I cannot read," he replied.
The Prophet said: The angel seized me and pressed me until I was about to expire. Then he let me go and said: "Read!"
I said: "I cannot read."
He seized me and pressed me a second time until I was about to expire. Then he let me go and said: "Read!"
"I cannot read."
He seized me and pressed me a third time until I was about to expire. Then he let me go and said:
Read, in the name of your Lord Who created: He Created man from a clot of blood. Read, and your Lord is the most gracious, Who taught by the pen (96:1-4).
[ʿĀʾishah continued]: The Messenger of God returned, his heart quaking. He went to Khadījah b. Khuwaylid and said: "Cover me." So they [his family] covered him until the fear went away. Then he told Khadījah what had happened, and said: "I was afraid for my life."
"No," said Khadījah. "God would never let you down. For indeed

you connect with your relatives, carry the burden of others, clothe the poor, host guests, and help those who are facing difficulties."
She then went and brought Waraqah b. Nawfal b. Asad b. ʿAbd al-ʿUzzá. He was Khadījah's cousin, who had converted to Christianity before the appearance of Islam. He could write Hebrew, and wrote what God willed him to write of the Bible in Hebrew. He was an old man at the time, who had lost his sight.
Khadījah said to him: "My cousin, listen to your nephew."
Waraqah said to him [the Prophet]: "My nephew, what did you see?"
So the Messenger of God told him what he had seen.
"This is the law which God revealed to Moses! Would that I could be a part of it. Would that I could be alive when your people drive you away."
"They will drive me away?"
"Yes," Waraqah confirmed. "Anyone who brought something like what you are bringing was opposed. If I am still around when your days [of challenge] come, I will aid you valiantly." But before long Waraqah died, while there was a halt in revelation.[1]

(2) The Prophet said: I was walking when I heard a voice from the heavens. I looked up, and an angel had come to me in Ḥirāʾ, sitting upon a seat between the heavens and the earth. I was awestruck, so I returned home and said: "Cover me! Cover me.!" Then God revealed: *O you wrapped in thy cloak! Rise up and warn! Magnify your Lord, and purify your garment, and keep away from all impurity* (74:1-5). Thus the revelation fired up and continued.[2]

(3) Gabriel came to Muḥammad and said: "O Muḥammad, read!"
"What should I read?"
Gabriel clasped him to himself and said: "O Muḥammad, read!"
"What should I read?"
He said: *Read, in the name of your Lord Who created… what he knew not* (96:1-5).

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd al-Razzāq, Aḥmad, ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, al-Bukhārī, Muslim, and Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Anbārī's *al-Maṣāḥif*, Ibn Mardawayh and al-Bayhaqī, on the authority of Ibn Shihāb, on the authority of ʿUrwat b. al-Zubayr.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Shihāb, on the authority ofAbū Salamat b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, on the authority of Jābir b. ʿAbd-Allāh al-Anṣārī, part of a narration on the halt in revelation.

He went to Khadījah and said: "O Khadījah, something must have happened to me!"
She said: "No, by God, your Lord would not do anything harmful to you. You have never committed any indecency."
Then Khadījah went to Waraqah and told him what had happened. He said: "If what you are saying is true, your husband is certainly a prophet. And he will surely suffer much hardship from his people. If I live to see that time, I will surely join his call."
Then Gabriel ceased [bringing revelations] for a while. So Khadījah said: "It seems to me that your Lord must be displeased with you."
Thus God revealed: *By the forenoon! And by the night when it settles! Your Lord has not abandoned you, nor is He displeased* (93:1-3).[1]

Author's comment: The story in the above narrations is not free from problems. The biggest problem is the Prophet's doubt that what he was experiencing was a divine revelation of God's words through a heavenly angel, and wondering—even speculating—that he was possessed by demons. Even more problematic is the Prophet's trust in the word of a Christian monk, whereas God says: *Say: I am upon clear evidence from my Lord* (6:57). What clear evidence was there in Waraqah's speech? God also says: *Say: This is my way. I summon to Allah with insight—I and he who follows me* (12:108). Did this insight come from his trust in what Waraqah said? And what about those who followed him: How could their insight be founded on the Prophet's assurance if he had no decisive proof? God also says: *We have indeed revealed to you as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after him* (4:163). Were those prophets reassured of their prophethood in the same way that we see in this story? The truth is that the revelations that the prophets and messengers receive are accompanied by certitude, such that the prophet or messenger who receives it would know definitely that this message is from God. This is what we are told in narrations from the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt.

(4) A narration says that the first thing brought down by Gabriel was Sūrah al-Ḥamd (Chapter 1).

(5) Once Abū Jahl said: "Does Muḥammad [really] place his face on dust in front of you?"
They said: "Yes."
"By the one who is sworn by," he said, "if I see him doing that, I

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Shaybah, Ibn Jarīr and Abū Nuʿaym's *al-Dalāʾil*, on the authority of ʿAbd-Allāh b. Shaddād.

will crush his neck!"

Someone said: "There he is, praying." So Abū Jahl went to trample on the Prophet's neck. But suddenly they saw him recoiling toward them, and protecting himself with his hands.

"What's wrong, Abū al-Ḥakam?"[1]

He said: "There was a trench of fire between me and him, and some winged creatures!"

The Prophet of God said: "By the One in Whose hand is my soul, if he had come close to me, the angels would have snatched him [and torn him apart] limb by limb." Then God revealed from *Have you seen the one who forbids?* (96:9) to the end of the sūrah.[2]

(6) Regarding this verse [96:9] *Tafsīr al-Qummī* it says: That was al-Walīd b. al-Mughīrah, who used to prohibit the people from praying, and from obeying God and His Messenger. Thus God revealed: *Have you seen the one who forbids a servant when he prays?* (96:9-10).

Author's comment: This does not agree with the apparent context of the verses, which imply that the one praying was the Prophet.

(7) The Messenger of God said: A servant is closest to God when prostrating.[3]

(8) Imam al-Riḍā said: A servant is closest to God in prostration. This is what He says: *prostrate and draw near* (96:19).[4]

(9) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: *Al-ʿAzāʾim* (Qur'anic chapters with an obligatory verse of prostration) are: *Alif-Lām-Mīm tanzīl* (Chapter 32), *Ḥā-Mīm tanzīl* (Chapter 41), *wa al-najm idhā hawá* (Chapter 53), and *iqraʾ bism rabbika* (Chapter 96). Any others in the Qur'an are recommended, not obligatory.[5]

1 This was Abū Jahl's original title (*kunyah*). He was called Abū Jahl by Muslims after his fierce opposition to the Prophet. (Ed.)

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Muslim's *Saḥīḥ*.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of ʿAbd-Allāh b. Masʿūd.

4 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of al-Washshāʾ.

5 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, ʿAbd-Allah b. Sinān.

Chapter 97

al-Qadr (The Destiny)

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Verses 1-5

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 5 verses. It states that the Qur'an was sent down on the Night of Destiny, and underscores the greatness of this night by saying that it is better than a thousand months. It is a night in which the angels and the Spirit descend. The chapter could have been revealed in Mecca or Medina. There are some narrations from the Imams confirming the view that it was revealed in Medina.[1]

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إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ ﴿١﴾

(97:1) *Indeed We sent it down* (anzalnāhu, from inzāl) *on the Night of Destiny.*

The pronoun "it" refers to the Qur'an. Apparently what is meant is the entire Qur'an, not just some verses of it. This can be confirmed by the usage of the verb *inzāl* (to send down, to reveal), which implies a sudden act of sending at once, as opposed to *tanzīl*, which implies a gradual act of sending. The same idea is found elsewhere: *By the Manifest Book! Indeed We sent it down* (anzalnāhu) *on a blessed night* (44:2-3). In the first verse [44:2] God apparently swears by *the Manifest Book* in its entirety, and then He describes how this object of His oath was sent down in one incident.

These verses indicate that the Qur'an had a one-time concise descent upon the Prophet as a whole, in addition to its gradual descent over the twenty-three years of his mission. The latter revelation is described in other verses like: *We have sent the Qur'an in [discrete] parts so that you may*

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1 These are narrations which say that the sūrah was revealed after the Prophet had a vision of the Umayyads ascending his pulpit, which distressed him. Then God comforted him by revealing this sūrah. (Auth.)

read it to the people a little at a time, and We have sent it down piecemeal (17:106); *The faithless say, 'Why has not the Qur'an been sent down to him all at once?' So it is, that We may strengthen your heart with it, and We have recited it [to you] in a measured tone* (25:32).

Some exegetes have suggested that *We sent it down* refers to the onset of the revelation, pertaining to only *some* verses of the Qur'an. However, given what we said, this view should be disregarded.

The Qur'an does not specify which night it was, apart from the verse: *The month of Ramadan, in which the Qur'an was sent down* (2:185). Together, these verses show that the Night of Destiny was in the month of Ramadan. However, to determine the exact day of the month we would have to rely on the narrations. We shall present some traditions in this regard in our examination of narrations, God-willing.

God has named this night the night of *qadr*, where *qadr* apparently means *taqdīr* (measurement, ordainment, predestination). Hence, it is the night in which God decrees the events of the coming year, such as birth, death, sustenance, felicity and wretchedness. This is also indicated in Sūrah al-Dukhan in the description of the night: *Every definitive matter is differentiated* (yufraqu) *in it, as an ordinance from Us. Indeed We have been sending [messengers], as a mercy from your Lord* (44:4-6). What is meant by the differentiation of *Every definitive matter* (44:4) is precisely decreeing and establishing the specifics of the events to come through divine destiny (*taqdīr*).

This implies that the special night of *qadr* is repeated annually. Every lunar year, in the month of Ramadan, there is a night in which the matters from that year to the same night of the next year are decreed. Otherwise, it does not make sense to have only a single night ever, when all the events before it and after it are decreed. This can be confirmed by three points: (1) The verb *yufraqu* (is differentiated, 44:4) is in the present tense, which implies continuous action. (2) It *is better than a thousand months* (97:3). (3) *In it the angels and the Spirit descend…* (97:4) [which is also in the present tense]. Nonetheless, there could be a single night in which the Qur'an was sent down in its entirety.

Here are some other suggested views on the verse:

(1) It was only a single night in which the Qur'an was revealed, never to repeat again.

(2) It repeated every year in the time of the Prophet, and then God lifted the night.

(3) It is the exact same night every year.
(4) It is repeated every year but at different times: one year in the month of Ramadan, one year in Shaʿbān, and so forth.

Comment: There is no basis for any of these views given what we said above.

(5) *Qadr* here means *manzilah* (status, position). Its appellation indicates how precious this night is, and the value of those who worship in it.
(6) *Qadr* here means *ḍīq* (constriction, tightness). This appellation is because the earth becomes crowded on that night since the angels come down.

Comment: The weakness of the last two views should be clear.

In short, as one can see, the verses are saying that it is a specific night which repeats yearly in the month of Ramadan, when all affairs are decided and preordained by divine decrees. This does not contradict the occurrence of some change in what is decreed during that year, because a change in what is decreed (*muqaddar*) is different from a change in the decree itself (*taqdīr*). Similarly, God may will to effect a change in cosmic events [in the realm of time and space], while the same events are preordained and fixed in the Guarded Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*). He says: *and with Him is the Mother Book* (13:39).

Moreover, one could say that the determination and finalization of affairs can have several stages and layers according to the actualization of their causes and the fulfillment of their conditions. Hence, it could be that, on the Night of Destiny, some of these stages may be assigned and decreed, but others may be delayed. However, the narrations do not support this view, as we shall see below.

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ ﴿٢﴾

(97:2) ***And what will show you what is the Night of Destiny?***

This verse indicates the grand position and exalted rank of that night. This emphasis is highlighted by the repetition of *Night of Destiny* in this verse and the next verse—*And what will show you what is the Night of Destiny? The Night of Destiny is…* (97:2-3)—instead of using a pronoun: "And what would make you know what *it* is? *It* is better…"

لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ خَيْرٌ مِنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ ﴿٣﴾

(97:3) *The Night of Destiny is better than a thousand months.*

This is a concise interpretation of the night's lofty position, as indicated by the last verse: *And what will show you what is the Night of Destiny?* (97:2). Exegetes have said that the reason it is better than a thousand months is because of the excellence of worship in it. This suits the Qur'anic objective of bringing people closer to God. Hence, keeping vigil on that night through worship is better than worshiping for a thousand months. This can also be inferred from the adjective *blessed* in the verse: *Indeed We sent it down on a blessed night* (44:3). There is yet another interpretation for the verse, which we shall present in our examination of narrations below, God-willing.

تَنَزَّلُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ فِيهَا بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ مِنْ كُلِّ أَمْرٍ ﴿٤﴾

(97:4) *In it the angels and the Spirit* (al-rūḥ) *descend* (tanazzalu), *by the leave* (bi-idhn) *of their Lord, with every command* (amr).

Tanazzalu was originally *tatanazzalu*. The apparent meaning of *the Spirit* is the reality related to the divine command: *Say, "The Spirit is of the command of my Lord"* (17:85). *Idhn* is "granting permission." That is, announcing that are no obstacles or prohibitions against doing something.

There are a number of suggested interpretations for the preposition *min* (from, of):

(1) It means the letter *bāʾ* (by, with).[1]

(2) It marks the origin of a movement (called *ibtidāʾ al-ghāyah*) and effectively implies causality. That is: "They descend *because* of—or *through*—every divine command."

(3) It indicates the justification for an act by presenting its purpose and objective. The meaning is: "They descend *in order to* direct every command."

Comment: The truth is that there are two possible interpretations for the preposition *min* based on two possible meanings of *amr* (command, affair):

(4) *Amr* means the divine command as defined by the verse: *All His command, when He wills something, is to say to it "Be"* (36:82). In this case, the preposition *min* marks the origin of a movement and

1 The meaning would be: "They bring down God's command." (Ed.)

effectively implies causality. The meaning would be: "The angels and the Spirit descend on the Night of Destiny by the permission of their Lord. Their descent *starts and emanates from* the divine command."[1]

(5) *Amr* refers to all events that transpire in the world of existence. In this case, the preposition *min* would be equivalent to the letter *lām* which signifies justification (called *taʿlīliyyah*). The meaning would be: "The angels and the Spirit descend on that night by the permission of their Lord *in order to* manage every affair in the world of creation."[2]

سَلَامٌ هِيَ حَتَّىٰ مَطْلَعِ الْفَجْرِ ۝٥

(97:5) *It is peaceful* (salām) *until the break of the dawn.*

Al-Mufradāt says: "*Salām* (peace) and *salāmah* (health, soundness) mean being free from defects and afflictions, outer or inner." Therefore, *It is peaceful* refers to God's grace and mercy spreading upon His worshipers who turn to Him, and the closing of the gates of any new punishment and misery on this night. An implication of this peace is that the devils are stopped from carrying out their plots, as mentioned in some narrations.

Another suggested meaning is: "The angels send greetings of peace upon the worshiping believers by whom they pass." This interpretation effectively traces back to the first view.

The last two verses—*In it the angels…* (97:4-5)—are an interpretation of the verse before them: *The Night of Destiny is better than a thousand months* (97:3).

Examining Narrations

(1) Once Abū Dharr asked: "O Messenger of God! Does the [Night of] Destiny exist only in the time of the prophets, when the divine command descends upon them? Does it come to an end when they pass away?"

"No," he replied. "It continues until the Day of Resurrection."[3]

Author's comment: The same idea is conveyed in more than one Sunni

1 This is the same as the second suggested view above. (Ed.)

2 This is the same as the third suggested view above. (Ed.)

3 *Tafsīr al-burhān*, on the authority of al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī.

narration.

(2) Once Imam al-Ṣādiq was inquired about the Night of Destiny. He said: "Seek it on the nineteenth, the twenty-first, and the twenty-third [of Ramadan]."[1]

Author's comment: There are further narrations which express the same idea. Some narrations limit it to either the twenty-first or the twenty-third, like a narration reported from Imam al-Bāqir by al-ʿAyyāshī, on the authority of ʿAbd al-Wāḥid. It can be gleaned from the narrations that the Night of Destiny is the twenty-third night. This is not explicitly specified to highlight its grandeur and position, so that people would not take it lightly by disobeying God in it.

(3) It is narrated from either Imams al-Bāqir or al-Ṣādiq: The night of the twenty-third is al-Juhanī's night. His story was that once he told the Messenger of God, "My house is far from Medina. If I were to come to town in only one night a year, which night should it be?" The Prophet commanded him to come on the twenty-third night.[2]

(4) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: On the nineteenth night, destiny is apportioned. On the twenty-first, it is confirmed. On the twenty-third, it is executed [or finalized].[3]

Author's comment: Other narrations convey the same meaning. Narrations from the Ahl al-Bayt agree that: (1) The Night of Destiny repeats perpetually every year. (2) It is in the month of Ramadan. (3) It is one of the three nights [19th, 21st or 23rd]. But Sunni narrations disagree in a surprising manner, to the point that they cannot be reconciled. The most common view among them is that the Qur'an was revealed on the twenty-seventh night. Interested readers should refer to *al-Durr al-manthūr* or other collections [of hadith].

(5) The Messenger of God said: I saw in a dream the Umayyads ascending my pulpit, which distressed me a lot. Then God revealed

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Ḥammād b. ʿUthmān, on the authority of Ḥassān b. Abī ʿAlī.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of ʿAbd-Allāh b. Bukayr, on the authority of Zurārah. Al-Juhanī's name was ʿAbd-Allāh b. Anīs al-Anṣārī. His narration is also related through Sunni chains of transmission, as reported in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Mālik and al-Bayḥaqī.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Zurārah.

the chapter: *Indeed We sent it down on the Night of Destiny…* (97:1-5).[1]

Author's comment: This means that God comforted the Prophet by giving him the Night of Destiny, and making it better than a thousand months—which was the duration of the Umayyad rule. There are many Shia narrations from the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt expressing this meaning.

(6) Once Imam al-Ṣādiq was asked: "How can the Night of Destiny be better than a thousand months?" He said: "Acts [of worship] during it are better than acts carried out for a thousand months—excluding such a nigt."[2]

(7) Ḥumrān said: Once I asked Imam al-Bāqir about the verse: *Indeed We sent it down on a blessed night* (44:3). He said: "Indeed, that is the Night of Destiny, and it occurs every year in the month of Ramadan, during the last ten nights. The Qur'an was revealed on no other night than the Night of Destiny. God says: *Every definitive matter is differentiated in it* (44:4). On this night, the destiny for all things is apportioned for that year, until the same night in the next year, such as every gain and loss, obedience and disobedience, birth and death, and all sustenance. Whatever is destined and decreed on that night is definite. Nevertheless, it is still subject to God's will."

I said: "*The Night of Destiny is better than a thousand months* (97:3). What does it mean?"

"A good deed during it," the Imam explained, "such as prayer, charity and other forms of good, is better than if it is done for a thousand months in which there is no Night of Destiny. This is something that the believers could not have achieved hadn't God multiplied [their deeds] for them. However, God multiplies their rewards for them."[3]

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Khaṭīb, on the authority of Ibn al-Musayyib. The same book has also reported a similar narration to this from Ibn ʿAbbās, on the authority of al-Khaṭīb's *Tarīkh*. It has also narrated a similar hadith from al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī, on the authority of al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Jarīr, al-Ṭabarānī, Ibn Mardawayh and al-Bayḥaqī.

2 *Al-Kāfī*, on the authority of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, on the authority of some of his companions, of whom he only remembers Saʿīd al-Sammān.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of al-Fuḍayl, Zurārah and Muḥammad b. Muslim.

Author's comment: "Nevertheless, it is still subject to God's will" implies the absolute power of God. It is up to Him to decree whatever He wills, even if something has been finalized. His finalization of something does not restrict His unqualified omnipotence. He is capable of repealing an ordained decree, even though He never wills to do so.

(8) The Prophet said: On the Night of Destiny, the angels which reside by *sidrat al-muntahá* (the Lote Tree of the Ultimate Boundary) [53:14] come down [to the earth]. Among them is Gabriel, who comes down with some flags. He raises a flag over my tomb, a flag over Bayt al-Maqdis [in Jerusalem], a flag over the Sacred House [the Kaʿbah], and a flag on Mount Sinai. He greets with peace (*salām*) every believing man or woman, except for those who habitually drink alcohol, eat pork, or anoint themselves with saffron.[1]

(9) Abu Baṣīr said: Once I was with Imam al-Ṣādiq, where he was speaking about the special qualities of an Imam when he is born. He said: "On the Night of Destiny he is entitled to a visitation (*ziyārah*)[2] from the Spirit."

I said: "May I be your ransom, isn't the Spirit the same as Gabriel?"

"Gabriel is one of the angels," he explained, "but the Spirit is greater than the angels. Doesn't God say: *the angels and the Spirit descend* (97:4)?"[3]

Author's comment: There are very many narrations about the Night of Destiny and its excellence. Some mention signs of it which occur sometimes but not always, such as the sun rising the next day without any rays, or having a moderate weather. We shall skip these narrations.

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās.

2 Some versions say *ziyādah*, where the meaning would be: "He is entitled to receive a greater share of the Spirit." This would correspond to verse 58:22 and some narrations on it. (Ed.)

3 *Tafsīr al-burhān*, on the authority of Saʿd b. ʿAbd-Allāh, via its chain of narration.

Chapter 98

al-Bayyinah (The Clear Proof)

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Verses 1-8

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

This sūrah was revealed in Medina and consists of 8 verses. It establishes the Prophet's mission to the People of the Book and the polytheists. In other words, he was sent to both the followers of previous religions, and others. This effectively means a universal message for humanity at large. This is an expression of God's custom to guide all humankind, as reflected in verses like: *We have guided him to the path, whether he be grateful or ungrateful* (76:3); *and there is not a people but a warner has gone among them.* (35:24).

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This chapter proves the Prophet's universal message by stating that it consists of the beliefs and actions which are necessary for the development of humankind. We shall see this below, by God's will.

The sūrah could be either Meccan or Medinan, although it best resembles the Medinan chapters.

لَمْ يَكُنِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ مُنفَكِّينَ حَتَّىٰ تَأْتِيَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَةُ ﴿١﴾

(98:1) ***Those who disbelieved from among*** **(min)** ***the People of the Book and the polytheists were not to be let loose*** **(munfakkīn from infikāk)** ***until the clear evidence would come to them:***

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The theme of these verses is to argue against the People of the Book and the polytheists who rejected the call to Islam, and the People of the Book who fell into disarray. Given this context, the first verse is presenting the Prophet as a clear proof established for humanity. Establishing this proof is according to God's everlasting custom among His servants. Divine custom necessitates: (1) sending a clear evidence [indicated in verse 98:1];

and (2) sending this evidence before the people split into different faiths [indicated in verse 98:4].

Therefore, *Those who disbelieved* refers to those who rejected the Prophet's call to Islam, among both the People of the Book and the polytheists. The preposition *min* (from, of) is partitive, not descriptive.[1] The contradistinction between *the People of the Book* and *the polytheists*—indicated by the conjunction "and"—shows that the latter includes all people other than the People of the Book, such as those who worshiped idols, and so forth.

Infikāk, which means "separation after being strongly attached." Given the latter part of the verse—*until the clear evidence would come to them*—what is meant is being no longer liable to the divine custom of providing guidance and clarification to everyone. It is as though they were tightly held by the divine custom until clear evidence had come to them, at which point the divine custom released them to act as they will. This is according to the verse*: It is not for Allah to lead a people astray after guiding them until clear guidance had come to them regarding what they should be wary of* (9:115).

… until the clear evidence* (al-bayyinah) *would come to them: This statement apparently describes a future event [compared to the previous part of the verse]. *Bayyinah* (clear evidence, manifest sign) is the outer proof. The meaning is: "Those who rejected—the Prophet's mission, his message, or the Qur'an—were not going to be released and given a leash until after the clear evidence came to them. And that clear evidence is Muḥammad."

There is a staggering variety of opinions among exegetes regarding the interpretation of this verse and its words, to the point that one of them has said, "This is among the most difficult verse of the Qur'an in terms of composition and meaning." Our interpretation above is in accord with the theme and context of the chapter, and does not necessitate any inconsistency between the verses, nor any contradiction between the various sentences and words. Whoever wishes to learn more about the exegetical controversy around this verse should consult the extensive books of *tafsīr*.

رَسُولٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ يَتْلُو صُحُفًا مُّطَهَّرَةً ﴿٢﴾

1 That is, the verse does not imply that *all* People of the People have disbelieved, but *some* of them. (Ed.)

(98:2) *a messenger from Allah reciting pure scriptures* (ṣuḥuf),

This verse and the next one interpret *the clear evidence* (98:1). The context is quite clear that the *messenger from God* is Muḥammad. *Ṣuḥuf* is the plural of *ṣaḥīfah*, which is used for "things that are written on." Here, it refers to the partial revelations of the Qur'an. *Ṣuḥuf* is used repeatedly in the Qur'an to refer to the revealed books, including the Qur'an: *In honored scriptures* (ṣuḥuf)*, exalted and purified, in the hands of envoys, noble and pious* (80:13-16)

The scriptures are called *pure* to indicate that they are not defiled by any mix of falsehood or by the touch of demons. God repeatedly points out that the Qur'an is a word of truth which is guarded from the meddling of devils: *None touch it save the purified* (56:79).

فِيهَا كُتُبٌ قَيِّمَةٌ ﴿٣﴾

(98:3) *wherein are upright* (qayyimah) *writings* (kutub).

Kutub is the plural of *kitāb*, meaning "something written" (*maktūb*). There are several usages for the term: (1) tablets, paper, and anything with words engraved on it; (2) the words which are inscribed; (3) the meaning conveyed by the words; (4) judgments and decrees. For instance, it is said that something is "written upon" (*kutiba ʿalá*) someone when it is ordained that they must do it. God says: *Prescribed for you* (kutiba ʿalaykum) *is fasting* (2:183); *Warfare has been prescribed for you* (kutiba ʿalaykum) (2:216).

The verse talks about *writings* that are in the *scriptures* (98:2). Therefore, what is meant by *writings* is divine teachings and ordinances regarding beliefs and acts. This is why the word is used with the adjective *qayyimah* (upright, upholding), because upholding a thing means to protect it, look after its well-being, and ensure its happiness. God says: *He has commanded you to serve none except Him. That is the upright religion* (12:40). Certainly the revealed scriptures look after human society and protect its well-being through their decrees and ordinances concerning beliefs and actions.

The meaning of these two verses [98:2-3] is: "The clear evidence that has come is a messenger from God, who is reciting the revealed scriptures that are purified from the defilement of falsehood. In these scriptures are ordinances and decrees which protect human society and looks after its well-being."

وَمَا تَفَرَّقَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ إِلاَّ مِن بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْهُمُ الْبَيِّنَةُ ﴿٤﴾

(98:4) *And those who were given the Book did not divide, except after the clear evidence had come to them.*

The first verse—*Those who disbelieved from among the People of the Book…* (98:1)—refers to their rejection of the Prophet and his book which contained the true call. This verse refers to their internal disagreements prior to the advent of Islam. This is mentioned in various places in the Qur'an, such as: and *those who were given the Book did not differ except after knowledge had come to them, out of envy among themselves* (3:19).

… except after the clear evidence had come to them: This refers to the divine message which was clarified to them by their books and prophets. The Qur'an says: *When Jesus brought the manifest proofs, he said, "I have certainly brought you wisdom, and [I have come] to make clear to you some of the things that you differ about. So be wary of Allah and obey me. Indeed Allah is my Lord and your Lord; so worship Him. This is a straight path." But the factions differed among themselves* (43:63-65).

Objection: Why should the verse highlight the sectarian splits among the People of the Book? If some split is to be pointed out, should it not be the divergence of the polytheists from the religion of monotheism and their rejection of the divine messengers?

Response: It is not far-fetched to say that the verse's expression—*those who were given the Book did not divide*—also includes the polytheists. This is based on a subtle difference between this verse and the first verse. The first verse mentions "the People of the Book" (*ahl al-kitāb*), which, in the Qur'anic nomenclature, is used for Jews and Christians, and perhaps also Sabeans and Zoroastrians. But this verse uses the phrase "those who were given the Book" (*alladhīna ūtū al-kitāb*). God has clarified that He sent down the Book—meaning a divine code for governing worldly disputes—to *all* people as soon as their differences set in. But once the truth was made clear to the nations and they no longer had any excuse, they started differing in God's religion. Hence, all humanity received a book from God; then they fell into disagreement. Some forgot what they were given; others distorted it; and others maintained it and believed in it. God says: *Humankind were a single community; then Allah sent the prophets as bearers of good news and as warners, and He sent down with them the Book with the truth, that it may judge between the people concerning that about which they differed, and none differed in it except those who had been given it, after the manifest proofs had come to them, out of envy among themselves*

(2:213). The reader should refer to our discussion on this verse.[1]

Another similar verse is: *These are the messengers, some whom We favored with greater excellence above others… and had Allah willed, those who came after them would not have fought after the clear evidence had come to them. But they disagreed, so some of them believed, and some of them disbelieved* (2:253).[2]

In short, *those who were given the Book* is more general than the People of the Book. Therefore, the verse encompasses the polytheists as well as the People of the Book.

وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلاَّ لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ حُنَفَاء وَيُقِيمُوا الصَّلاَةَ وَيُؤْتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَذَلِكَ دِينُ الْقَيِّمَةِ ﴿٥﴾

(98:5) *Yet they were not commanded except to worship Allah, dedicating their faith to Him as men of pure faith* (ḥunafāʾ)*, and to maintain the prayer and pay the zakāt. That is the upright religion.*

The pronoun "they" refers to *Those who disbelieved from among the People of the Book and the polytheists* (98:1). The meaning is: "The mission of God's Messenger and the upright decrees in the revealed scripture only consisted of the command to serve God, on the condition of being sincere in their religion and not associating anything with Him."

Ḥunafāʾ describes the condition of the subject of the sentence (called *ḥāl*). It is the plural of *ḥanīf*, which is derived from *ḥanaf*. *Ḥanaf* means "to incline away from the two extremes of doing too much and too little, to the balanced center." God has called Islam the *ḥanīf* (upright) way because, in all matters, it calls to moderation and guarding against excess or negligence.[3]

… and to maintain the prayer and pay the zakāt…: The prayer and the *zakāt* (poor-rate, prescribed religious tax) are pillars of Islam, where one orients oneself in worship toward God specifically, and gives away one's wealth for the sake of God. This is a case of stating the specific after the general, or the part after the whole, in order to show emphasis and

1 See volume 3, pp. 147ff of the English translation. (Ed.)

2 See volume 4, pp. 117-119 of the English translation. (Ed.)

3 See verse 35:32 and the threefold division of people in Chapter 56 (al-Wāqiʿah) for both the merits and the limits of the middle path. (Ed.)

importance.

… That is the upright religion: What is meant here, according to exegetes, is "the religion of the upright scriptures." And there are two possible interpretations for upright scriptures: (1) It refers to all revealed books, starting from Noah's onwards. The meaning would be: "What they were called to by the Prophet Muḥammad is the same religion that was put on their shoulders in the upright scriptures of all times. It is not a new innovation, for God's religion is one. They must follow it since it is upright." (2) It refers to the upright teachings and rulings in purified scriptures, recited to them by the Prophet [98:2-3]. The meaning would be: "The Islamic message to which they were called to only commanded them to ordinances and rulings that would protect the well-being of human society. Hence, they have no alternative but to believe in it and follow it."

In any case, the verse refers to the religion of divine monotheism, which is contained within the Qur'an, *confirming what was before it of the Book and as a guardian over it* (5:48). It enjoins what is upright for human society and what will promote their true interests in life. God has stated this most articulately in the verse: *So set your heart on the religion as a people of pure faith, the origination of Allah according to which He originated humankind. There is no altering Allah's creation. That is the upright religion* (30:30).

This verse completes the chapter's objective of establishing the universal message of the Prophet. The first verse—*Those who disbelieved from among the People of the Book and the polytheists…* (98:1)—refers to the divine custom of guidance, which necessitates the completion of proof against the disbelievers, and leaving them without any excuse. This equally applies to the People of the Book, as well as the polytheists. The clear evidence in question here [that is, Prophet Muḥammad] came to only *some* of the people, but God's general principle of guidance necessarily applies to everyone. Hence, if it is applicable to some people, it is also applicable to others.

The next verse—*a messenger from Allah…* (98:2)—indicates that this clear evidence is Muḥammad. The verse, *And those who were given the Book did not divide…* (98:4) further clarifies that even before the advent of Islam, they had received clear evidence, yet they disagreed and disbelieved. Finally, the current verse—*Yet they were not commanded except to worship Allah…* (98:5)—shows that what they were called to and commanded to follow was the upright religion that promotes the well-being of society.

Therefore, it is incumbent on them to believe in it and not reject it.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ فِي نَارِ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أُولَٰئِكَ هُمْ شَرُّ الْبَرِيَّةِ ﴿٦﴾

(98:6) ***Indeed the faithless from among the People of the Book and the polytheists will be in the fire of hell, to remain in it [forever]. It is they who are the worst of creatures*** **(al-bariyyah).**

The previous verses clarified a few points: (1) God's custom of divine guidance necessitates sending a clear evidence to the people. (2) This clear evidence ordered them to follow the upright religion. (3) Despite receiving this clear evidence, they rejected it. Thus this verse and the ones after it embark on giving warnings and glad tidings to the disbelievers and the believers, respectively. *Bariyyah* is synonymous with *khalq* (creation, creatures, people). The meaning of the verse should be clear.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمْ خَيْرُ الْبَرِيَّةِ ﴿٧﴾

(98:7) ***Indeed those who believe and do righteous deeds—it is they who are the best of creatures.***

This verse confines goodness to believers who act righteously, just as the previous verse confines evil to the disbelievers.

جَزَاؤُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتُ عَدْنٍ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا رَّضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ ذَٰلِكَ لِمَنْ خَشِيَ رَبَّهُ ﴿٨﴾

(98:8) ***Their reward, near their Lord, is the Gardens of Eden*** **(ʿadn),** ***with streams running in them, to remain in them forever. Allah is pleased with them, and they are pleased with Him. That is for those who fear their Lord.***

ʿAdn means "stability, establishment, permanence." Therefore, *Gardens of Eden* are eternal and everlasting gardens.

… to remain in them forever…: This phrase emphasizes the meaning of *ʿadn*.

… Allah is pleased with them, and they are pleased with Him…: God's pleasure is one of His attributes of action. It manifests in the form of the reward which He gives to these people for their faith and righteous deeds.

… That is for those who fear their Lord: This a trademark that assures eternal happiness. God says: *Only those of Allah's servants having knowledge fear Him* (35:28). Knowing God leads to holding Him in awe, which leads to having faith in Him, which means: (1) subscribing to God as one's lord and object of worship; (2) performing righteous deeds.

Commentators have differed widely on their interpretations of the terms in these verses. They have offered myriad views that are not worth presenting here. Whoever wishes to learn more about their discussions should consult the extensive books of *tafsīr*.

Examining Narrations

(1) Imam al-Bāqir said: *The clear evidence* (98:1, 98:4) is Muḥammad, God's Messenger.[1]

(2) ʿĀʾishah said: Once I asked, "Messenger of God, who are the worthiest of people to God?"
He said, "ʿĀʾishah, have you not read: *Indeed those who believe and do righteous deeds—it is they who are the best of creatures* (98:7)?"[2]

(3) Jābir b. ʿAbd-Allāh said: Once we were with the Prophet, when ʿAlī came in. The Prophet said, "By the One in Whose hand is my soul, he and his followers (lit. *shīʿah*) will be the successful on the Day of Resurrection." Then it was revealed: *Indeed those who believe and do righteous deeds—it is they who are the best of creatures* (98:7). Then whenever ʿAlī came by, the Companions of the Prophet would say, 'The best of creation has come.'"[3]

(4) Imam ʿAlī said: The Messenger of God told me while leaning on my chest, "ʿAlī! Haven't you heard the words of God, *Indeed those who believe and do righteous deeds—it is they who are the best of creatures* (98:7)? They are your followers. Our rendezvous shall be *al-ḥawḍ* (the Prophet's Fountain on the Day of Judgment). When

1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn ʿAsākir. The same idea is also narrated in the following sources: (1) From Ibn ʿAbbās, in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn ʿAdī. (2) From ʿAlī, in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh. (2) From ʿAlī, in *Tafsīr al-burhān*, on the authority of Muwaffaq b. Aḥmad's *al-Manāqib*, on the authority of ʿAlī's scribe: Yazīd b. Sharāḥīl al-Anṣārī.

all nations are gathered for reckoning, you [plural] will be summoned with bright radiating faces."[1]

(5) Regarding *it is they who are the best of creatures* (98:7) Ibn ʿAbbās said: This was revealed about ʿAlī and his household.[2]

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of al-Ḥākim's *Shawāhid al-tanzīl*, on the authority of Yazīd b. Sharāḥīl.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority Muqātil b. Sulaymān, on the authority of al-Ḍaḥḥāk.

Chapter 99

al-Zilzāl (The Quake)

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Verses 1-8

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

This sūrah was revealed in Medina and consists of 8 verses. It speaks of the resurrection, when people will come forth for accounting. It refers to some of its signs, such as the earth's shaking and relating its chronicles. The verses are compatible with having been revealed in either Mecca or Medina.

إِذَا زُلْزِلَتِ الْأَرْضُ زِلْزَالَهَا ﴿١﴾

(99:1) ***When the earth quakes with its quaking*** **(zilzālahā).**

Its quaking signifies a specific ascription to the earth.[1] This indicates that it will be a tremendous and colossal quake, at the utmost degree of terror and intensity.

وَأَخْرَجَتِ الْأَرْضُ أَثْقَالَهَا ﴿٢﴾

(99:2) ***And the earth discharges its burdens*** **(athqālahā).**

Athqāl could be the plural of two words: (i) *thaqal*, which is synonymous with *matāʿ* (commodity, article, ware), or more specifically "a traveler's provisions"; (ii) *thiql*, meaning "load, cargo, burden." In either case, the word in this verse has been interpreted in three ways: (1) It means the dead. (2) It means the treasures and precious metals hidden in the earth's belly. (3) It includes both. The first interpretation is most likely, followed by the third. Therefore, the verse would refer to the dead proceeding out of their graves toward their ḥisāb (reckoning, accounting), wherefrom they will then move on toward their *jazāʾ* (compensation, payment, retribution):

1 *Zilzāl* is a *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund) like *zalzalah* (quaking, rocking, shaking). (Auth.)

On that day, people will issue forth (99:6).

وَقَالَ الإِنسَانُ مَا لَهَا ۝٣

(99:3) ***And man*** **(al-insān)** ***says, "What is the matter with it?"***

Stupefied and astonished at this terrible, intense earthquake, people will ask, "What is wrong with the earth? Why is it shaking like this?" Some say that *al-insān* (man, the human being) in this verse refers specifically to those who do not believe in the afterlife, not the believers. There are also other views, which will be presented below.

يَوْمَئِذٍ تُحَدِّثُ أَخْبَارَهَا ۝٤

(99:4) ***On that day it will relate its chronicles,***

The earth will bear witness to the deeds of the children of Adam—along with the other witnesses, including their own limbs, the scribes from the angels who are appointed over them, and all other witnesses, human and non-human.

بِأَنَّ رَبَّكَ أَوْحَى لَهَا ۝٥

(99:5) ***for its Lord will have inspired*** **(awḥā, from īḥāʾ)** ***its.*** **(lahā).**

The meaning is: "The earth will recount its news *because* its Lord will inspire it to do so."[1] This means that the earth is conscious of the good and evil deeds that are committed on it. It carries and retains these records, until when it is ordered to broadcast them and testify to what it has borne. We already discussed this idea under the following verse: *There is not a thing but celebrates His praise, but you do not understand their glorification* (17:44); *They [their skins] will say, "We were given speech by Allah, who gave speech to all things"* (41:21). As we explained, it can be deduced that life and consciousness pervade all things, though we may be unaware of this fact.[2]

Exegetes have disagreed tremendously over the meaning of the earth recounting its news through divine inspiration. Some suggested interpretations are:

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1 The verb *īḥāʾ* (to inspire, to reveal, to beckon, to impart) is made ditransitive by the preposition *lām* [which marks the person or object which receives the inspiration]. Hence, the letter *lām* in *lahā* means *ilá* (to, toward). (Auth.)

2 See volume 25, pp. 145ff of the English translation, under verse 17:44. (Ed.)

The inanimate earth will be given life and consciousness so that it can disclose what has transpired on it.

God will create a voice speaking on behalf of the earth, and that counts as the earth's speech.

The earth will reveal what has taken place on it through its state and mode of being (called *lisān al-ḥāl*).[1]

Comment: Given what we said above, there is no place for these disagreements. Moreover, none of these forms of testimony is a decisive evidence in a court of justice.[2]

يَوْمَئِذٍ يَصْدُرُ النَّاسُ أَشْتَاتًا لِّيُرَوْا أَعْمَالَهُمْ ﴿٦﴾

(99:6) ***On that day, people will issue forth*** **(yaṣduru, from ṣudūr)** ***in various groups*** **(ashtātan)** ***to be shown their deeds.***

Ṣudūr means "emerging, coming out, issuing." It is used when a camel comes out, up, and forth from a watering place or a trough. *Ashtāt*, like *shattá*, is the plural of *shatīt*, meaning "varied, scattered, dispersed."[3]

… people will issue forth in various groups…: People will move on from their position [of accounts] on the Day of Judgment toward their final abode in either paradise or hell. The happy and successful ones will be distinguished from the wretched and miserable.

… to be shown their deeds: There are two possible meanings for this: (1) They will be shown their retribution for their deeds as they settle in their final abodes. (2) They will observe their actual deeds, according to the doctrine of the embodiment of deeds (*tajassum al-aʿmāl*).

Another suggested interpretation is: The verse describes how people will emerge from their graves, where some will have bright faces, and others gloomy; some will be at peace, and others in terror; as well as other qualities in which people will differ. They will be brought forth to be informed

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1 *Lisān al-ḥāl* is what is understood from one's condition and mode of being. Its opposite is *lisān al-qāl* (language of words), which is when someone actively expresses something, either through sound waves, writing, or otherwise. (Ed.)

2 That is, the earth's speech will be part of God's evidence against the people on the Day of Judgment. However, the suggested interpretations do not qualify the earth as a veritable witness. (Ed.)

3 The word *When* (99:1) introduces a conditional statement. Verse 99:4 provides the complement to that, and this verse is a second complement for *When…* (99:1). (Auth.)

about the recompense of their deeds through reckoning. Hence, *ruʾyah* (seeing, vision) in this verse means *ʿilm* (knowing, knowledge), and *irāʾah* (showing, making one see) means *iʿlām* (informing, announcing, making one know). The verse is comparable to: *The day when every soul will find present whatever good it has done, and whatever evil it has done* (3:30).

However, the first interpretation is more apparent and clearer.

فَمَن يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ ۝٧ وَمَن يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ ۝٨

(99:7-8) ***So whoever* (fa-man) *does an atom's* (dharrah) *weight (mithqāl) of good will see it. And whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it.***

Mithqāl means "a unit of weight." *Dharrah* refers to the "specks of dust" seen in the sunlight. It is also used for tiny ants.

The letter *fāʾ* (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of this verse shows that this is a consequence and conclusion of the people being *shown their deeds* (99:6). These verses emphasize that no act will be exempt in this process of being shown to its doer. Nothing will be missing, not even a tiny speck of good or evil. Using a separate verse for each of the two groups—the good-doers and the evil-doers—is meant to provide a standard and to establish a universal law.

The universal law given in these two verses does not contradict other verses which describe deeds vanishing or being transferred from one person to another—for instance, a killer's good deeds being transferred to the victim, or the victim's bad deeds being transferred to the killer. It also does not contradict the idea that, when some people repent, their bad deeds will be transformed to good deeds. We discussed this in "An Essay on the Rules Governing Actions," and also in our exposition of the verse: *So that Allah may distinguish the wicked from the good* (8:37).[1]

Those more specific verses override the current two verses under discussion. For instance, if a person loses their good deeds, they will not have any good deeds to be shown. A similar analysis can be applied to the other cases. The reader should reflect on this.

Examining Narrations

(1) The Messenger of God said: "The earth shall speak on the Day of Resurrection about all that transpired on its back." Then he recited:

1 See volume 3, pp. 223ff of the English translation. (Ed.)

When the earth quakes with its quaking… for its Lord will have inspired it (99:1-4), and said, "Do you know what its chronicles will be? Gabriel came to me and said, 'On the Day of Resurrection, it will give a report of every action that was done on its back.'"[1]

(2) The Messenger of God said: O people! This world is a commodity at hand, which both the virtuous and the wicked command. But the hereafter is a true promise, under an Omnipotent King's command. The truth He will establish, and the falsehood He will disband.

O people! Be not the children of this world, but the children of the other. For indeed every child follows their mother. Act while with the awe of God you are replete. Know that you will be exposed to all your feat, and that there is God Whom you will certainly meet. *So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it. And whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it* (99:7-8).[2]

(3) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *And the earth discharges its burdens* (99:2): loads of people. *And man says, "What is the matter with it?"* (99:3): that is Imam ʿAlī. *On that day she will relate its chronicles… On that day, people will issue forth in various groups* (99:4-6): they will come grouped as believers, disbelievers and hypocrites. *To be shown their deeds* (99:6): they will stand before what they have done.

(4) Imam al-Bāqir said: *So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it* (99:7): If that is an inhabitant of hell who has done a bit of good in this world, they will regret that they did it for other than God. *And whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it* (99:8): If that is an inhabitant of paradise, they will see their evil deed on the Day of Resurrection, then it will be forgiven for them. [3]

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh and al-Bayhaqī's *Shuʿab al-īmān*, on the authority of Anas b. Mālik. A similar narration to this is narrated on the authority of Abū Hurayrah.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Ḥusayn b. Sufyān's *Musnad* and Abū Nuʿaym's *al-Ḥilyah*, on the authority of Shaddād b. Aws.

3 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

Chapter 100

al-ʿĀdiyāt (The Chargers)

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Verses 1-11

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

This sūrah was revealed in Medina and consists of 11 verses. It explains how humans are ungrateful to their Lord and hanker after material good. Since they are cognizant of this trait, it will be an argument against them on the Day of Judgment and they will be held accountable for it.

This chapter was revealed in Medina, as one can see from the oaths in it, such as: *By the snorting chargers* (100:1). These oaths apparently refer to the horses of the cavalry, as we shall discuss below. Jihad was ordained only after the Prophet's migration to Medina. This view is supported by Shia narrations from the Imams, saying that the sūrah was revealed about Imam ʿAlī and his army in the Battle of Dhāt al-Salāsil.[1] Some Sunni narrations also support this, which will be discussed in our examination of narrations below, God-willing.

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وَالْعَادِيَاتِ ضَبْحًا ﴿١﴾

(100:1) *By the snorting* (ḍabḥan) *chargers* (al-ʿādiyāt, from ʿadw)*!*

ʿAdw means "galloping, running quickly." *Ḍabḥ* is the sound of horses' breaths as they race along. Typically, it is used for horses, although some say that it is also used for other animals. The verse means: "I swear by the horses which are rushing along and panting hard!"

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1 Dhāt al-Salāsil refers to a battle fought in either 629 or 633 CE, which would be either during the time of the Prophet or the time of Abū Bakr. Since Sunni and Shia accounts differ widely in their accounts of this battle, it is possible that there were two separate battles called Dhāt al-Salāsil. The narrations cited at the end of this chapter about ʿAlī refer to a battle during the time of the Prophet. (Trans.)

Two other suggested views are:

(1) The verse is about the camels of pilgrims which carry their riders from Muzdalifah to Miná on the Day of Sacrifice.

(2) It refers to war-camels.

Comment: The descriptions in the subsequent verses do not suit camels.

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فَالْمُورِيَاتِ قَدْحًا ﴿٢﴾

(100:2) ***By the strikers*** **(fal-mūriyāt, from īrāʾ)** ***of sparks [with their hoofs]*** **(qadḥan)*!***

Īrāʾ means "causing fire, igniting, kindling." *Qadḥ* means "hitting, striking." When one makes a fire by striking two things, it is said: *qadaḥa fa-awrá*. Here, it is means the sparks that fly when the hooves of horses hit stones and the pebbly ground.

Other suggested meanings for *īrāʾ* include:

(1) People's plots in war.

(2) Kindling fire [of war].

(3) The tongues of people which kindle fires [of animosity and destruction] through the enormity of their speech.

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Comment: The weakness of these views should be clear [given the context].

فَالْمُغِيرَاتِ صُبْحًا ﴿٣﴾

(100:3) ***By the raiders*** **(fal-mughīrāt, from ighārah)** ***at dawn,***

Ighārah and *ghārah* mean "making a surprise attack on the enemy with cavalry." It is a quality of the horse-riders; hence, its applications to the horses in this verse is figurative. The verse means, "I swear by the horses attacking the enemy by surprise at dawn."

Some exegetes have said: The verse refers to the camels which rise and carry their riders from Muzdalifah to Miná on the Day of Sacrifice, because it is recommended that they wait until the morning before they move.

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According to this view, *ighārah* would express how fast they urge the camels along. However, this conflicts with the apparent meaning of *ighārah*.

فَأَثَرْنَ بِهِ نَقْعًا ﴿٤﴾

(100:4)*: raising* (fa-atharna, from ithārah) *therein a trail of dust (naqʿan)*,

Ithārah means "kicking up" dust or the like. *Naqʿ* means "dust." The meaning is: "The horses strike up clouds of dust as they gallop and raid."[1]

فَوَسَطْنَ بِهِ جَمْعًا ۝٥

(100:5)*: and penetrating* (fa-wasaṭna, from wasṭ) *by it* (bihi) *a host!*

Wasṭ is synonymous with *tawassuṭ* (being in the midst of, interposing). There are two possible meanings for the verse depending on how *by it* is interpreted: (1) "They appeared in the midst of the enemy forces at dawn."[2] (2) "They appeared in the midst of the crowd covered by dust."[3]

Some have suggested that the verse describes the camels which appear in the midst of the crowd in Miná. However, the reader should realize by now that, given the words used in these five verses [100:1-5], they cannot plausibly be matched with the camels of the pilgrims, moving from Muzadlifah to Miná.

The surest view is that the verses pertain to the horses of the warriors [in the way of God]. And the context of these verses—especially *And by the raiders at dawn* (100:3) and, *and penetrating by it a host* (100:5)—clarify that what is meant is the warriors themselves, though God swears by their charging horses. The letter *fāʾ* (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of each verses show the sequence of the events.

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنُودٌ ۝٦

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1 While the previous verses start by an adjective, this verse starts by a verb (*atharna*). Yet, the verse is connected to the previous verses by the conjunction *fāʾ* (so, therefore, then). Some exegetes have clarified that such usage of *fāʾ* is acceptable because the adjectives in the previous verses are active participial nouns (sing. *ism al-fāʿil*), which take on the meaning of a verb. Hence, it is as though the verses say: "I swear by those horses which gallop, which kindle sparks, which raid, and which arouse dust." (Auth.)

2 Here, the pronoun "it" refers to *dawn* (100:3), and the preposition *bāʾ* (by, with) means *fī* (in, at). (Auth.)

3 Here, the pronoun "it" refers to *dust* (100:4), and the preposition *bāʾ* indicates *mulābasah* (coverage, connectedness, company). (Auth.)

(100:6) ***Indeed man*** **(al-insān)** ***is ungrateful*** **(la-kanūd)** ***to his Lord,***

Kanūd, is synonymous with *kafūr* (ungrateful). This verse can be compared to: *Indeed man is very ungrateful* (la-kafūr) (22:66). The verse speaks of the aspect of human nature which leads them to pursue their desires and immerse in worldly pleasures. As a result, they cease to be grateful to their Lord for what He has blessed them with. The verse criticizes those who were raided since they were ungrateful for the blessing of Islam that God had sent them. This is the greatest blessing, because with it, comes a goodly life here and eternal bliss in the hereafter.

وَإِنَّهُ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ لَشَهِيدٌ ﴿٧﴾

(100:7) ***and indeed he is [himself] witness to that!***

To maintain consistency across the verses, the pronoun "he" must refer to *al-insān* (man, the human being; 100:6). It means that people are aware of carrying the ungrateful gene. "Being witness" here means observing a reality [not testifying to it in a court]. The meaning is: "Human beings carry this knowledge that they are ungrateful toward their Lord." Hence, the verse is comparable to: *Rather, man is very insightful over himself* (75:14).

Some exegetes hold that the pronoun "he" refers to God, but the context does not support this.

وَإِنَّهُ لِحُبِّ الْخَيْرِ لَشَدِيدٌ ﴿٨﴾

(100:8) ***And he is indeed avid*** **(shadīd)** ***in the love*** **(li-ḥubb)** ***of good*** **(al-khayr).**

Exegetes have offered two interpretations for this verse:

(1) "Because of their intense love for wealth, people are greedy and stingy."[1]

(2) "Humans are enamored by wealth, and that dissuades them from paying God's due and spending in the way of God."

However, perhaps *khayr* signifies good in its unqualified sense. The meaning is: "Loving one's good and interest is inherent in humankind." The problem is when the people come across the dazzling display and

1 Here, the letter *lām*—in *li-ḥubb*—signifies justification (*taʿlīl*); good (*khayr*) means "wealth"; and *shadīd* (intense, avid, strong) means "covetous, avaricious." (Auth.)

adornments of this world, and take that to be their good. This attraction diverts them from being grateful to their Lord.

أَفَلَا يَعْلَمُ إِذَا بُعْثِرَ مَا فِي الْقُبُورِ ﴿٩﴾ وَحُصِّلَ مَا فِي الصُّدُورِ ﴿١٠﴾ إِنَّ رَبَّهُمْ بِهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَخَبِيرٌ ﴿١١﴾

(100:9-11) ***Does he not know? When what is in the graves is turned over* (buʿthira, from baʿtharah)*, and what is in the breasts is divulged* (ḥuṣṣila mā fī al-ṣudūr)*, indeed their Lord will be best aware of them on that day.***

Baʿtharah (like *baḥtharah*) means "resurrecting, arousing, dispersing." The verse literally says, "when what is in the breasts is obtained." This means distinguishing and classifying what people hold within, such as belief or disbelief, benevolence or malevolence. God says: *On the day when the secrets are examined* (86:9). Another suggested meaning is: "The secrets that have been concealed in the breasts will be revealed so that people are requited for them just as they are requited for their outward deeds."

Do they not know?...: This is a rhetorical question that conveys rebuke. The object of knowing is an omitted sentence that is implied by the context. Then the verse starts a new sentence which emphasizes the rebuke: *When what is in the graves is turned over…* (100:9), referring to their bodies.

The meaning is—and God knows best: "Do they not know that their ingratitude toward their Lord has consequences that they shall face and be requited for? When their bodies are taken out of their graves, and everything inside their souls—such as belief and disbelief, obedience and disobedience—is extracted, then their Lord will be well aware of them. Thus He will requite them for it all."

Examining Narrations

(1) The Messenger of God sent an army detachment to one of the branches of Kināna tribe, and appointed al-Mundhir b. ʿAmr al-Anṣārī, who was one of the tribal chiefs, as its commander. When they did not return on time, the hypocrites said, "They have been all killed." So God informed about them by revealing: *By the snorting chargers* (100:1).[1]

1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Muqātil.

(2) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: This sūrah was revealed when the Prophet sent Imam ʿAlī on the operation Dhāt al-Salāsil, where he defeated the enemy. That was after several other Companions had been sent there, but had returned to the Messenger of God [without success].[1]

Author's comment: *Majmaʿ al-bayān* adds: "This battle was named Dhāt al-Salāsil (chained, fettered) because the enemy was [widely] slain and taken captive. Their hands were tied from the back with ropes, as if they were fettered in chains."

(3) When this sūrah was revealed, the Messenger of God led the Morning Prayer for the people, and recited this sūrah in it. When he finished, the Companions said, "We had not heard this sūrah before." The Messenger of God said, "That is right. Indeed ʿAlī triumphed over the enemies of God, and Gabriel brought me its good news last night." After a few days, ʿAlī returned with war booty and prisoners."[2]

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, part of a longer hadith.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

Chapter 101

al-Qāriʿah (The Pounder)

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Verses 1-11

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 11 verses. It presents both glad tidings and warnings of the resurrection, though there is more emphasis on warning.

الْقارِعَةُ ﴿١﴾

(101:1) ***The Pounder*** **(al-qāriʿah)*!***

This verse offers a subject, while the next verse is its predicate.[1] The word *qāriʿah* is one of the Qur'anic names for the resurrection, derived from *qarʿ*, meaning "a severe blow, a massive strike." Some exegetes say that the resurrection is given this name because it will knock on the hearts with fear, and will also knock out the enemies of God with punishment.

مَا الْقارِعَةُ ﴿٢﴾

(101:2) ***What is the Pounder?***

Even though it is clear what *the Pounder* is, this verse asks a rhetorical question about it, indicating how immense and terrifying it is. The verse also shows that one cannot fathom the reality of *the Pounder*.

وَ ما أَدْراكَ مَا الْقارِعَةُ ﴿٣﴾

(101:3) ***What shall teach you what is the Pounder?***

This verse emphasizes the immensity of the Day of Resurrection.

---

1 This is like when a teacher mentions a concept (as God does in the first verse), and then asks the students what it means (as He does in the second). (Ed.)

يَوْمَ يَكُونُ النَّاسُ كَالْفَرَاشِ الْمَبْثُوثِ ﴿٤﴾

(101:4) *The day people will be like scattered* (mabthūth, from baththh) *locusts* (kal-farāsh).

Baththh means "dispersion, scattering, spreading." *The day* acts as a temporal container (*ẓarf*) qualifying an elided verb, such as "remind them" (*udhkur*, in the imperative), "it strikes" (*taqraʿu*) or "it comes" (*taʾtī*).[1] It is narrated from al-Farrāʾ:

Farāsh means a a mob of locusts. It is a swarm of locusts that would carpet (*yanfarish*) the land and mount upon one another.

Some exegetes have explained: When locusts take off, they fly around aimlessly, unlike other flying animals. That is why people on the Day of Resurrection are likened to locusts. When people emerge from their graves, terror will overtake them, and they will turn hither and thither. Alternatively, they will head for different destinations—that is, their abodes of happiness or misery.

وَ تَكُونُ الْجِبالُ كَالْعِهْنِ الْمَنْفُوشِ ﴿٥﴾

(101:5) *And the mountains will be like carded* (al-manfūsh, from nafsh) *wool* (kal-ʿihn).

ʿIhn means "multi-colored wool." *Nafsh* refers to the process of spreading out wool on a card or a similar tool. *Carded wool*, therefore, means multi-colored wool which has been spread out. This indicates how the mountains—in all their diverse colors—will crumble upon the quaking of the earth when the Hour sets in.

فَأَمَّا مَنْ ثَقُلَتْ مَوازِينُهُ ﴿٦﴾

(101:6) *As for him whose deeds weigh heavy in the scales,*

This refers to the weighing of deeds. It indicates that some deeds will weigh heavily on the scales, including faith and various acts of obedience, which are valuable to God. Others deeds will have no weight or status before God, namely *kufr* (disbelief, ingratitude) and various forms of disobedience.

1 In the first case (*udhkur*), the subject would be the Prophet. In the other two cases (*taqraʿu* and *taʾtī*), the subject would be the Pounder. (Ed.)

The two types of deeds differ in their consequences. The weighty deeds will result in happiness, while the light ones will produce misery. We already discussed the meaning of scales in the previous chapters.[1]

فَهُوَ فِي عِيشَةٍ راضِيَةٍ ﴿٧﴾

(101:7) *he will abide in a pleased* (rāḍiyah) *life* (ʿīshah).

The word *ʿīshah* means "a special type of life."[2] The adjective *pleased* is used for *life* metaphorically, because it is the person who is in fact pleased [with that life]. Alternatively, it involves an omission: *dhāt riḍá* (full of pleasure, possessed with pleasure, characterized by pleasure).

وَ أَمَّا مَنْ خَفَّتْ مَوازِينُهُ ﴿٨﴾ فَأُمُّهُ هاوِيَةٌ ﴿٩﴾

(101:8-9) *But as for him whose deeds weigh light in the scales, his home* (fa-ummuhu) *will be the Abyss* (hāwiyah).

Apparently the word *hāwiyah* (lit. falling, plunging) refers to hell. It is called *hāwiyah* because oe who is cast into it plunges down (*yahwī*) into its deepest depths. God says: *Then We relegated them to the lowest of the low. Except for those who believe* (95:5-6). Therefore, the fire is metaphorically called *hāwiyah* (falling, plunging) just like *a pleased life* (101:7). The verse refers to hellfire as the *umm* (lit. mother) of the person in the sense that it is the final abode and returning place of the individual, just as a child has recourse to their mother.

Some exegetes have said: *Umm* here means *umm al-raʾs* (the crown of the head). What is meant is that people will be cast headlong into hell.

However, this interpretation is unlikely, because then there would be no antecedent for the pronoun "it" in the next verse.

وَ ما أَدْراكَ ما هِيَهْ ﴿١٠﴾

(101:10) *And what will show you what it is* (hiyah)*?*

This verse serves an interpretative role for the last verse, and emphasizes the enormity of the fire. The pronoun "it" refers back to *hāwiyah* (101:9).

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1 See volume 15, pp. 8ff of the English translation, under verses 7:8-9. (Ed.)

2 It is constructed in a manner which expresses a specific type (like *jilsah*). (Auth.)

The suffix *h* at the end of *hiyah* provides a pause (*waqf*).

نارٌ حامِيَةٌ ﴿١١﴾

(101:11) *It is a scorching* (ḥāmiyah) *fire.*

This is a reply to the question in the previous verse and explains what is meant by *hāwiyah* (101:9). *Ḥāmiyah* means "scorching hot."

Examining Narrations

(1) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *like carded* (kal-ʿihn) *wool* (101:5): ʿ*Ihn* is wool. *Whose deeds weigh light in the scales* (101:8): This is being light for the lack of good deeds. *His home* (fa-ummuhu) *will be the Abyss* (101:9): This refers to one's *umm al-raʾs* (the crown of the head). The person will be cast into the fire headlong.

(2) The Messenger of God said: When a believer dies, he is greeted by those servants of God who have been granted divine mercy, just like people surround someone bringing good news in this world. They will say, "Let your friend rest, for he has just passed tremendous pangs." Then they will ask him, "What did this man do? What did that woman do? Did she get married?" If they ask him about someone who has already died, the newcomer will say, "Alas, he died before me," whereby the others will say, "*Indeed we belong to Allah, and to Him we return* (2:156). He has gone to his mother, the Abyss (*al-hāwiyah*).[1] What an evil mother it is, and a wretched nurse."[2]

1 This means that those who have been granted divine mercy have not seen the deceased, which shows that the person is destined to hell. That is why they lament. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority offrom Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī. *Al-Durr al-manthūr* has narrated the same idea from the Prophet on the authorities of Anas b. Mālik, al-Ḥasan and al-Ashʿath b. ʿAbd-Allāh al-Aʿmá.

Chapter 102

al-Takāthur (The Rivalry)

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Verses 1-4

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 8 verses. It severely rebukes the people for getting caught up in competition over amassing wealth, children, and supporters, while being heedless of the impending loss and divine punishment for such behavior. It warns them that they shall soon get to know and witness that. Moreover, they will be questioned about what they were blessed with. They were granted these blessings so that they may be grateful for them, but instead they got distracted with them, and thus transformed God's blessings into ingratitude.

The content of the sūrah is compatible with having been revealed in either Mecca or Medina. Narrations about its context of revelation will be discussed in our examination of narrations below, by the will of God.

أَلْهَاكُمُ التَّكَاثُرُ ﴿١﴾ حَتَّىٰ زُرْتُمُ الْمَقَابِرَ ﴿٢﴾

(102:1-2) *Rivalry in excess* (al-takātharu) *distracted you* (alhākum, from lahw), *until you visited the graves* (al-maqābir).

Al-Mufradāt says:

> *Lahw* means "something that distracts a person from what is important and what they should care about."
>
> When something keeps the person engaged from attending to what is more pressing, it is said: *alhāhu*. God says: *Rivalry in excess distracted you* (alhākum) (102:1).
>
> *Mukātharah* and *takāthur* signify "competing in the acquisition of wealth and status."

Miqbarah and *maqbarah* mean "the place of a grave." Their plural is *maqābir*. God says: *until you visited the graves* (al-maqābir) (102:2), where

al-maqābir means death figuratively.

Given the theme and context of these verses, the meaning is: "Vying in acquisition of worldly goods and adornments distract you from what is more important—namely, the remembrance of God—until you meet your death. Hence, you are heedless throughout your lives."

Another suggested meaning is: "You engrossed yourselves in vying boastfully over the number of men in a tribe, some saying, 'We have more men,' while others saying, 'No, we have more!' So you enumerated all the living, at which point you headed for the graveyards and started counting up all the dead, adding them to your scorecards. Hence, you competed with each other over the dead."

This view comes from some narrations about the chapter's context of revelation. They say that two tribes from the Anṣār (Medinan Supporters) started boasting about their living members, and then about their dead. Some narrations say that this happened in Mecca, between the tribes Banū ʿAbd Manāf and Banū Sahm. Then the sūrah was revealed in reference to that. We will present this story in our examination of narrations below.

كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣﴾

(102:3) ***Nay* (kallā)*! You will come to know.***

The exclamation *kallā* (nay, never, no way) rejects their distraction with unimportant things in lieu of what is truly important, and rebukes them for it.

… ***You will come to know:*** This is an expression of threat and warning. Given the context, the meaning is: "Soon you will learn about the consequences of your vain amusements. You shall realize that when you are cut off from your worldly life."

ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤﴾

(102:4) ***Again, nay! You will come to know.***

This verse emphasizes the rejection, rebuke and warning in the last verse. Some have said that the last verse is about what the people get to know upon their death, and this verse is about what they will learn upon the resurrection.

كَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ ﴿٥﴾

(102:5) ***Nay! Were*** **(law)** ***you to know with the knowledge of certitude,***

The word *Nay* is repeated to emphasize the previous refutation [of their heedless amusements and engrossments]. Certitude (*yaqīn*) means "knowledge that is free from any inaccuracy."

… Were you to know with the knowledge of certitude: This is a conditional clause with an omitted complement. The implied meaning is: "If you were to know the matter with certain knowledge, that knowledge would surely preoccupy you from wasting time on boasting, rivalry and acquisition."

لَتَرَوُنَّ الْجَحِيمَ ٦

(102:6) ***you would surely see hell*** **(la-tarawunna).**

Some exegetes have considered this verse to be an independent sentence, separate from the last. The letter *lām* indicates an oath. The meaning is: "I swear that you shall see hell, which is the recompense of entertaining and distracting yourselves as such." Their argument for this interpretation is: (a) The conditional particle *law* (if, were, should) in the last verse shows the impossibility of its complement. (b) However, seeing hell will certainly occur on the Day of Resurrection. (c) Hence, the current verse—*you would surely see hell*—cannot be a complement of the conditional clause in the last verse.

This view is based on the assumption that the verse is about seeing hell through physical sight, as stated in the verse: *and hell is brought into view for one who sees* (79:36). However, we do not grant this assumption. In fact, the apparent meaning of the current verse is that hell can be seen before the Day of Resurrection with the inner eye or the insight of the heart (*baṣīrah*). This is indeed one of the consequences of realizing the station of certitude, as reflected in the verse: *Thus did We show Abraham the dominions of the heavens and the earth, that he might be of those who possess certitude* (6:75). We discussed this idea previously.[1] This vision of the heart before the Day of Resurrection will not occur for those who occupy themselves with vanities, because it is impossible for them to achieve the

1 See volume 13, pp. 217ff of the English translation. (Ed.)

required certitude for it.[1]

ثُمَّ لَتَرَوُنَّهَا عَيْنَ الْيَقِينِ ﴿٧﴾

(102:7) *Then you will surely see it with the eye of certitude* (ʿayn al-yaqīn).

ʿAyn al-yaqīn means "certitude itself."[2] The meaning is: "You will surely see hell with absolute certainty." This verse is about seeing hell on the Day of Resurrection, as evidenced by the next verse: *Then, that day, you will surely be questioned concerning the great bounty* (102:8). Hence, the first "seeing" [102:6] refers to seeing hell *before* the Day of Resurrection, and the second one [102:7] refers to seeing hell *on* the Day of Resurrection.

Here are some other suggested views:

(1) The first "seeing" [102:6] is when they see hell before they enter it, and the second "seeing" [102:7] is when they see it after entering it.
(2) The first "seeing" [102:6] indicates knowledge, and the second one [102:7] indicates physical sight.
(3) "Seeing" is repeated as a literary device to express the continuity and perpetuity of their stay in hell.

Comment: There are other views as well, but all of them are implausible.

ثُمَّ لَتُسْأَلُنَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَنِ النَّعِيمِ ﴿٨﴾

(102:8) *Then, that day, you will surely be questioned concerning the great bounty* (al-naʿīm).

Apparently the rebukes and threats in this chapter are apparently directed at all people in general, but in reality they pertain to a subset of them: those who lost themselves in wrangling over vanities. Rivalry in amassment engages them from remembering God. Likewise, this verse is addressed to all people on the account of including a certain subset: those who are so preoccupied with what their Lord's blessings that they forgot

1 In other words, the author's interpretation—that verse 102:6 is a continuation of the previous verse—is compatible with the use of the conditional particle *law* in verse 102:5. (Ed.)

2 Given the author's discussion under the last verse, this verse is about seeing hell not through the insight of the heart in this world, but through the sight of the eye in the hereafter. Hence, *ʿayn al-yaqīn* can be translated as "the eye of certitude." (Ed.)

their Lord. For the same reason, the context suggests that *the great bounty* in this verse is meant in an unqualified sense, encompassing every type of blessing. That is, people will be questioned about anything that could be called a blessing or bounty from God.

What makes something a *niʿmah* (blessing, bounty, boon) for a person are two things: (1) the thing being harmonious with the person [that is, with the person's mode of being]; and (2) the thing being good and beneficial for the person. This can only be the case if the person uses the bounty in a way that brings them happiness and benefit. But if they use it contrary to that, that object would be a cause of misery for the person—even though, in and of itself, it may be a blessing.

God has created humankind and has decreed that the purpose of their creation—which is their ultimate perfection and happiness—lies in nearness to the divine through servitude. He says: *I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may serve Me* (51:56).

This [divine proximity through servitude] is God's *wilāyah* (guardianship, authority) over His servant. God has prepared for His servants everything that they need in order to succeed in their journey toward the goal for which they have been created. These are the blessings (sing. *niʿmah*) which God has showered upon them, both inwardly and outwardly [31:20].

The way to reach one's ultimate goal is using these blessings in a way that pleases God and brings one to one's desired destination. That is the meaning of obedience. But getting caught up with the very blessings and forgetting what is beyond them would be erring from the path and missing the destination. That is the meaning of disobedience. God has ordained a definite decree—which cannot be replaced or repealed—that humans shall return to Him, and He shall question them about their deeds, take them to account, and recompense them. And one's deeds are effectively one's way of utilizing the divine blessings. God, says: *that nothing belongs to man except what he strives for, and that he will soon be shown his endeavor, then he will be rewarded for it with the fullest reward; that the terminus is toward your Lord* (53:39-42). Therefore, questioning one about one's deeds is tantamount to questioning them about their blessings: "How did they use these blessings? Were they grateful or ungrateful for them?"

Examining Narrations

(1) Qatādah said: This chapter was revealed about the Jews. One tribe among them said, "We are greater in number than that tribe, and

that tribe is greater in number than that other tribe!" This preoccupied them until they died in error.[1]

(2) Abū Buraydah said: The chapter was revealed about some branches of the Anṣār (Medinan Supporters) that boasted with one another.[2]

(3) Muqātil and al-Kalbī said: The chapter was revealed about two factions of Quraysh: Banū ʿAbd Manāf b. Quṣayy and Banū Sahm b. ʿAmr. They started vying in number and counting their elite, where Banū ʿAbd Manāf won. Then they said, "Let's count our dead," so they visited the graveyards and began counting them up. "This is the grave of so-and-so; and this is the grave of so-and-so," they said. Then Banū Sahm scored higher because they were more populated before Islam.[3]

(4) Regarding the verse *Were you to know with the knowledge of certitude* (102:5), Imam al-Ṣādiq said: That is direct physical vision (*muʿāyanah*).[4]

Author's comment: This narration supports how we interpreted the verse.[5]

(5) Jamīl said: Once I asked Imam al-Ṣādiq about the verse *that day, you will surely be questioned concerning the great bounty* (102:8). He said: "This ummah (nation, people) will be asked about how they have been blessed by God through His Messenger and then through his Household (Ahl al-Bayt)."[6]

(6) Abū Khālid al-Kālibī says: Once I went to see Imam al-Bāqir. He ordered [his servants] to bring food, and I ate with him. I had never eaten anything more delicious and more exquisite. When we finished, he asked, "Abū Khālid, how did you like the food?" "May I be your ransom, I have never eaten anything better or more agreeable than that. But then I remembered the verse in the book

1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

4 *Tafsīr al-burhān*, on the authority of al-Barqī, on the authority of his father, on the authority of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, on the authority of Hishām b. Sālim.

5 This shows that the author has interpreted *muʿāyanah* as spiritual vision and clairvoyance (*mukāshafah*). (Ed.)

6 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*.

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of God: *Then, that day, you will surely be questioned concerning the great bounty* (102:8) [and that ruined my pleasure].

Imam al-Bāqir said, "[What it means is that] you will surely be asked about the truth [of our *wilāyah*] which you have subscribed to."[1]

(7) Abū Ḥamzah said: A group of us were with Imam al-Ṣādiq, and he called for some food. We had never eaten anything as delicious or delightful. Then he brought us dates which were so pure and exquisite that we could see our faces in them. Someone said, "*You will surely be questioned concerning* (102:8) this bounty which you enjoyed at the place of the son of God's Messenger."

Imam al-Ṣādiq said: "God is too noble and generous to feed you some food and make it agreeable to you, then haggle with you over it. Rather, He shall question you about His blessing of Muḥammad and his family upon you."[2]

Author's comment: This import is narrated from the Imams through many other chains and in other expressions. Some of them say, "*Al-naʿīm* (the great bounty, 102:8) is the *wilāyah* (divine guardianship, spiritual authority) of us Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet's Household)." This effectively boils down to what we said above: The unconditional form of the word *al-naʿīm* encompasses all divine blessings *in the sense that* they are blessings [for the person].

Further explanation: God would not question the people concerning any material enjoyment in the sense that it is meat, bread, date, cool water, hearing, sight, hand, leg, or the like. Rather, He would question about it *as a blessing* that He has created for humankind and made it a means of progress for them along their path toward perfection, which is attaining divine nearness through servitude. And He has commanded humankind be grateful for these blessings through how they to employ them. This is what we explained above.

Hence, what will be asked about is blessing qua blessing [not particular enjoyments of life in and of themselves]. Now, how do we know this is a blessing? And how do we know how to use this blessing gratefully? That is clarified to us through the religion brought by the Prophet, and further explicated upon by the Imams that he appointed from his family. Therefore,

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1 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration.

when people will be questioned about the blessings, they will really be asked about acting in accordance with God's religion in all that they do, in every movement and pause. Given that the reality of *the great bounty* (102:8) is God's religion, questioning about it amounts to questioning about the Prophet and the Imams after him, for God mandated their obedience. Our journey toward God consists of how we utilize God's blessings, and the proper way of doing so has been taught by His Messenger and the Imams. That is why it is incumbent on us to follow them.

Questioning about *the great bounty* (102:8) is effectively the same as questioning about God's religion. This is reflected in Abū Khālid's narration [number 6], where the Imam says: "You will surely be asked about the truth which you have subscribed to." And it is also the same as questioning about the Prophet and his Household, which is reflected in the narrations of Jamīl and Abū Ḥamzah [numbers 5 and 7]: "This ummah will be asked about how they have been blessed by God through His Messenger and then through his Ahl al-Bayt."

(8) Some narrations say: *The great bounty* (102:8) is the Messenger of God, with whom God has blessed the whole world, and through whom He has saved them from error.

(9) Some narrations say: *The great bounty* (102:8) is the *wilāyah* of us Ahl al-Bayt.

Author's comment: These narrations reduce to the same point, because the *wilāyah* (divine guardianship, spiritual authority) of the Imams means being obedient to them and following their path, which is the path of divine servitude.

(10) *Majmaᶜ al-bayān* narrates from ᶜIkrimah: "*The great bounty* (102:8) is health and peace." Then it adds: "This can be confirmed by a Prophetic narration: 'There are two blessings that many people do not make the most of: health and peace.'"[1]

(11) It is narrated from ᶜAbd-Allāh b. Masᶜūd, Mujāhid and Imams al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq: *The great bounty* (102:8) means safety and health.[2]

Author's comment: Some Sunni narrations say that *the great bounty* (102:8) is dates and cool water, and other narrations list other things. These must be viewed as offering some examples and applications of the term.

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1 *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*, on the authority of Ibn ᶜAbbās.

2 *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*.

(12) The Prophet said: There are three things which a person will not be questioned about: (1) a piece of cloth that covers their nudity; (2) a piece of bread that fulfills their hunger; (3) a dwelling that shelters them from heat and cold…[1]

Author's comment: This narration should be interpreted as saying that there will not be meticulous questioning or severe reckoning concerning the necessities of life. And God knows best.

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, via Sunni chains of narration.

Chapter 103

al-ʿAṣr (The Time)

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Verses 1-3

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 3 verses. It summarizes all Qur'anic teachings and pieces together all Qur'anic objectives in the most concise way. It could be either Meccan or Medinan, though it resembles the Meccan chapters more.

وَالْعَصْرِ ﴿١﴾

(103:1) ***By the time*** **(al-ʿaṣr)*!***

This is an oath, swearing by the time. The next two verses describe how human beings are in a state of loss, except for those who follow the truth and are patient upon it—which amounts to the believers who do righteous deeds. Given this context, it is most likely that *the time* in this verse refers to the era of the Prophet. That is, it is the time in which the sun of Islam rose and started shining over humanity. That is when truth vanquished falsehood.

Other interpretations include:

(1) The afternoon, which is the latter part of the day. That time demonstrates the power of the Lord because it marks the fading of the day as it gives in to night, and the ending of the reign of the sun.

(2) The Afternoon Prayer, which is *the middle prayer* (2:238). That is the best of the obligatory daily prayers.

(3) Day and night, which are called *ʿaṣrān*.

(4) Time or history in general, in the sense that wondrous events occur in it, pointing to the Lord's omnipotence.

(5) The time of the Mahdi's appearance, when truth will completely and finally dominate falsehood. This is mentioned in some

narrations.

There is more to the list.

إِنَّ الإِنسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ ﴿٢﴾

(103:2) *Indeed man* (al-insān) *is in loss* (khusrin).

Al-insān means humankind as a genus. *Khusr*, *khusrān*, *khasār* and *khasārah* all refer to "a loss in capital and one's original asset." Al-Rāghib says:

> When used as a verb, the subject of *khasira* can be either a person or an act. For instance, when a person experiences loss, it is said: *khasira fulān*. And when one's trade venture is not successful, it is said: *khasirat tijāratuhu*.

The word *khusrin* is indefinite, which can show either of two things: (1) emphasis and aggrandizement of the loss; (2) a specific type of loss, other than the loss of wealth or status, as God says: *Those who have lost* (khasirū) *themselves and their families on the Day of Resurrection—Look! That is a manifest loss* (khusrān) (39:15).

إِلاَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ ﴿٣﴾

(103:3) *Except those who believe and do righteous deeds, and enjoin one another to [follow] the truth, and enjoin one another to [have] patience.*

The last verse implies that humans in general are in loss. This verse qualifies that by exempting those who clothe themselves in faith and righteous deeds; they shall be safe from loss.

The Book of God makes it clear that humans have an eternal life which does not end with death. Death is but a transfer from one abode to another, as was explained in the exegesis of the verse: *from replacing you with your likes and recreating you in [a realm] you do not know* (56:61). The Qur'an clarifies that there are two halves to human existence. One half is the life of this world, in which humans are tested, and which determines how their life shall be in the other half. It determines whether they will have a happy or wretched eternal life. God says: *but compared with the hereafter, the life of this world is but a [trifling] enjoyment* (13:26); *Every soul shall taste death, and We will test you with good and ill by way of test* (21:35).

The Qur'an explains that it is one's beliefs and deeds in this life which

will manifest in the next life. That is how this life is a prelude to the next. True beliefs and righteous deeds are the foundation of happiness in the next life, while disbelief and corruption are the foundation of wretchedness there. God, says: *that nothing belongs to man except what he strives for, and that he will soon be shown his endeavor, then he will be rewarded for it with the fullest reward* (53:39-41); *Whoever is faithless shall face the consequences of his faithlessness, and those who act righteously only prepare for their own souls* (30:44); *Whoever acts righteously, it is for his own soul; and whoever does evil, it is to its detriment* (32:46). God calls what human beings will encounter in the afterlife *jazāʾ* and *ajr* (reward, compensation, payment, profit, remuneration) in many verses.

From all of this, it becomes clear that *life* is the capital of humans, which they invest to earn an eternal livelihood in the hereafter. If they follow the truth in their beliefs and actions, their investment will multiply, their earnings will be blessed, and they will be safe from future harm. But if they follow falsehood and turn away from faith and righteous deeds, they will lose out on their investment, and will be deprived of good in the hereafter. This is the meaning of: *Indeed man is in loss. Except those who believe and do righteous deeds, and enjoin one another to [follow] the truth, and enjoin one another to [have] patience* (103:2-3).

… those who believe…: What is meant by "belief" here is believing in God. Then an implication of believing in God is believing in *all* of His messengers and the afterlife. Elsewhere God says explicitly that if someone rejects some of God's messengers or the afterlife, then that person lacks belief in God.[1]

… and do righteous deeds…: Apparently this expression encompasses all good deeds. Therefore, the exception in this verse would not include sinful believers who fall short in performing certain righteous deeds. This means that *loss* (103:2) in this chapter is meant in a general sense: It is not limited to total loss in all aspects, as in the case of a militant atheist who opposes the truth deliberately; but also includes loss in certain aspects, as in the case of a wicked believer who will be sentenced to hell for a temporary period, and will then come out through intercession or other means.

… and enjoin one another to [follow] the truth: What is meant here is advising and recommending each other to follow the truth and to be steadfast on it. After all, that is the meaning of true religion: following the

1 See verses 4:150-151. (Auth.)

truth in belief and action. *Enjoin one another to the truth* is more comprehensive than enjoining good and forbidding evil (*al-amr bil-maʿrūf wa al-nahy ʿan al-munkar*), because it also includes the beliefs, as well as any form of encouragement and urging toward righteous deeds.

Therefore, *enjoin one another to [follow] the truth* is itself a subset of *do righteous deeds*. This makes it a case of stating the specific after the general, in order to show emphasis and importance. Similarly, enjoining one another to patience is an application of enjoining the truth. Therefore, the last part of the verse—*and enjoin one another to [have] patience*— is also a case of stating the specific after the general, meant to show emphasis and importance. This can be confirmed by the repetition of the verb *enjoin one another*, instead of saying "to truth and patience."

The order of expression is also significant here. The verse first states their belief and righteous deeds. Then it adds that they also advise each other to the truth and patience. This shows that their hearts have been revived, and their breasts have been opened toward submitting to God. Thus they are particularly attentive to, and fully concerned with, bringing about the complete dominance of the truth, and spreading it among all people, so that it may be followed forever. God, says: *Is someone whose breast Allah has opened to submission so that he follows a light from His Lord…? But shame on those whose hearts have been hardened to the remembrance of Allah. They are in manifest error* (39:22).

The word *patience* is mentioned in an unqualified form. Therefore, it would encompass all types of patience, including: (1) patience in the way of God's obedience; (2) patience in avoiding God's disobedience; and (3) patience in the face of afflictions and hardships that befall one by God's decree and destiny.

Examining Narrations

(1) Regarding *Except those who believe…* (103:3) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: He has excepted His select servants.[1]

Author's comment: In the continuation of this hadith, the Imam matches "belief" with belief in the *wilāyah* (divine guardianship, spiritual authority) of Imam ʿAlī. He also matches "enjoining to truth" with enjoining one's descendants and progeny about this [*wilāyah*].

1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Kathīr.

(2) Ibn ᶜAbbās said: *By the time! Indeed man is in loss* (103:1-2): This refers to Abū Jahl b. Hishām. *Except those who believe and do righteous deeds* (103:3): This refers to ᶜAlī and Salmān.[1]

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh.

Chapter 104

al-Humazah (The Scandal-monger)

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Verses 1-9

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 9 verses. It severely warns the arrogant money-grubbers who amass wealth in order to lord it over others, look down upon them, and find fault with them unjustifiably.

وَيْلٌ لِكُلِّ هُمَزَةٍ لُمَزَةٍ ﴿١﴾

(104:1) *Shame on every scandal-monger* (humazah, from hamz) *and slanderer* (lumazah, from lamz),

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Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> *Humazah* is someone who frequently spreads false libels about others and blames them for what is not really blameworthy. The root meaning of *hamz* is "breaking."
>
> *Lamz* also means "flaw, defect, slander." *Humazah* and *lumazah* are synonyms. However, according to al-Layth, there is a slight difference between them, in that *humazah* is someone who slanders others behind their back, while *lumazah* is someone who slanders them in their face.
>
> Some also say that *humazah* is a person who annoys the other with their foul words, whereas *lumazah* is a person who does so non-verbally, through gestures of the eye and head.
>
> The verbal pattern *fuʿalah* denotes someone who does an action frequently, such that it becomes second nature to them. For instance, *nukaḥah* is a man who often does *nikāḥ* (sex, marriage), and *ḍuḥakah* is one who is given to laughing. *Humazah* and *lumazah* follow the same pattern.

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The meaning is: "Shame on every slanderer and gossiper." Exegetes

have also proffered other views according to their different interpretations of *humazah* and *lumazah*.

الَّذِى جَمَعَ مَالًا وَعَدَّدَهُ ﴿٢﴾

(104:2) *who amasses some wealth and counts it over.*

This verse interprets *scandal-monger and slanderer* (104:1). The word *wealth* is in the indefinite form, which indicates insignificance. This is because no matter how abundant one's wealth may be, it cannot do nothing for its owner beyond taking care of their daily needs, such as some food and drink to satisfy their hunger and thirst.

***… and counts it over* (ʿaddadahu, from taʿdīd)** *Taʿdīd* is synonymous with *ʿadd*, which means "counting, enumerating, tallying." The meaning is: "Since they are so enamored with wealth, they constantly endeavor to amass more of it, and then count their wealth again and again because it gives them pleasure to see how much they have hoarded."

Some have interpreted *taʿdīd* as "making a backup" (*ʿuddah*). The meaning would be: "They stockpile money as a precautionary measure against potential future tragedies."

يَحْسَبُ أَنَّ مَالَهُ أَخْلَدَهُ ﴿٣﴾

(104:3) *He supposes* (yaḥsabu) *his wealth will make him immortal* (akhladahu).

They think their wealth will make them immortal in this world by staving off death and destruction.[1]

Because of being engrossed in far-fetched hopes and attached to the worldly life, humans will never be content with the amount of wealth necessary to take care of their meagre daily needs. As their wealth increases, so too will their covetousness, to which there is no end. The way they conduct themselves in life is as though they suppose their wealth would make them immortal. Out of their instinct to live and survive, they acquire wealth and keep count of it. The wealth that they accumulate and count will give them a sense of self-sufficiency and superiority over others, as God, says: *Indeed man transgresses for he views himself self-sufficient* (96:7).

1 The present tense of the verb *yaḥsabu* shows that the verb *akhladahu* conveys a future meaning, even though it is in the past tense. (Auth.)

This sense of arrogance and transgression [104:2-3] would lead them to slander and gossip [104:1].

Here, it becomes clear that the current verse—*He supposes his wealth will make him immortal* (104:3)—explains the cause of the last verse: *who amasses some wealth and counts it over* (104:2), which itself is the cause of the first verse: *shame on every scandal-monger and slanderer* (104:1).

كَلَّا ۖ لَيُنۢبَذَنَّ فِي الْحُطَمَةِ ﴿٤﴾

(104:4) *Nay* (kallā)*! He will surely be tossed* (la-yunbadhanna, from nabdh) *into the Crusher* (al-ḥūṭamah).

The exclamation *kallā* (nay, never, no way) refutes their notion that their wealth will keep them alive forever. The letter *lām* in *la-yunbadhanna* expresses an oath. *Nabdh* means "flinging, throwing away, discarding." *Ḥūṭamah* is an intensive form derived from *ḥaṭm*, meaning "breaking, cracking." It is also defined as "consuming, eating." *Ḥūṭamah* is one of the names of hell, as interpreted below: *[It is] the fire of Allah, set ablaze* (104:6). The meaning is: "Contrary to what they suppose, their wealth will not make them immortal. Rather, I swear that they will die and then be flung into the Crusher."

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْحُطَمَةُ ﴿٥﴾

(104:5) *And what shall teach you what is the Crusher?*

This is to emphasize the magnitude of *the Crusher*, and to inspire awe in the audience.

نَارُ اللَّهِ الْمُوقَدَةُ ﴿٦﴾

(104:6) *[It is] the fire of Allah, set ablaze* (al-mūqadah, from īqād), When used for fire, *īqād* means "kindling, setting aflame."

الَّتِي تَطَّلِعُ عَلَى الْأَفْئِدَةِ ﴿٧﴾

(104:7) *which will overspread* (taṭṭaliʿu, from iṭṭilāʿ) *the hearts* (al-afʾidah).

Iṭṭilāʿ and *ṭulūʿ* mean "rising, appearing and hanging" above something. *Afʾidah* is the plural of *fuʾād*, which is synonymous with *qalb* (heart). Both terms, in the Qur'anic nomenclature, refer to our principle

of consciousness and reasoning, which amounts to the human soul.

Apparently what is meant here is that hellfire burns both the interior and the exterior of a person, as opposed to worldly fires, which only burn the outside. God says: *Its fuel will be humans and stones* (2:24).

إِنَّهَا عَلَيْهِمْ مُؤْصَدَةٌ ﴿٨﴾

(104:8) ***Indeed it will close in upon them***

They will be entirely surrounded by it. They will have no escape or refuge from it.

فِي عَمَدٍ مُمَدَّدَةٍ ﴿٩﴾

(104:9) ***in outstretched*** **(mumaddadh, from tamdīd)** ***columns*** **(ʿamad).**

ʿ*Amad* is the plural of ʿ*amūd* (pillar, pole, column.) *Tamdīd* is an exaggerated form of *madd* (stretching, extending). Some suggested interpretations are:

(1) The verse describes stakes that will close in on the inhabitants of hell.

(2) It describes massive and extended shackles in which they will be locked. They are like wooden posts or giant tree-trunks with holes pierced into them, where the feet of prisoners—such as thieves—are tied.

There are also other views.

Examining Narrations

(1) *Rūḥ al-maʿānī* has narrated several views on the person wbout whom this sūrah was revealed: (1) Ubayy b. Khalaf.[1] (2) Ubayy b. ʿAmar al-Thaqafī, known as al-Akhnas b. Sharīq, since he was a foul-mouthed gossiper.[2] (3) Umayyah b. Khalaf al-Jumaḥī, who used to pick on the Prophet.[3] (4) Jamīl b. ʿĀmir.[4] (5) Al-Walīd

1 On the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, on the authority of al-Suddī.

2 On the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, on the authority of Ibn Isḥāq, on the authority of ʿUthmān b. ʿUmar.

3 On the authority of Ibn Isḥāq.

4 On the authority of Ibn Jarīr and others, on the authority of Mujāhid.

b. al-Mughīrah, who also used to defame and disparage the Messenger of God. (6) Al-ʿĀṣ b. Wāʾil.

Author's comment: The author of *Rūḥ al-maʿānī* then adds, "It is possible that the chapter was revealed with reference to all of." It could also be that these are the narrators matching the verse with specific people, as is the case in many narrations concerning the context of revelation of the verses (*asbāb al-nuzūl*).

(2) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *Shame on every* humazah (104:1): That is a person who winks at people [disdainfully] and scorns the poor. *And* lumazah (104:1): That is someone who turns away their head and gets angry when they see a poor person or a beggar. *Who amasses some wealth and counts it over* (104:2): This means accumulating wealth and storing it away.

(3) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *Which will overspread the hearts* (104:7): It sets fire to the hearts. Abū Dharr said: "Warn the arrogant about being branded in their chest, and dragged on their back." *Indeed it will be* muʾṣadah *upon them* (104:8): It [*muʾṣadah*] means *muṭbaqah* (closed, locked, covered). *In outstretched columns* (104:9): By God, when the stakes [of fire] stretch out toward them, the stakes will consume their skins.

(4) Imam al-Bāqir said: The disbelievers and polytheists will taunt the [sinful] monotheists in hell, saying: "We don't see your monotheism having done any good for you. We and you are all in the same boat."

The Almighty Lord will take offence at that. So He will order the angels, "Intercede!" They will intercede for whomever God wills. Then He will order the prophets, "Intercede!" They will intercede for whomever God wills. Then He will order the believers, "Intercede!" They will intercede for whomever God wills. Then He will say: "I am the Most Merciful of all merciful. Leave [the fire], by My mercy!" Thus they [the monotheists] shall leave [hell] like moths fluttering off.

Then the columns [of hell] will be outstretched and will close in on them. That, by God, will mark eternity.[1]

1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of al-ʿAyyāshī, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Muḥammad b. al-Nuʿmān al-Aḥwal, on the authority of Ḥumrān b. Aʿyan.

Chapter 105

al-Fīl (The Elephant)

Verses 1-5

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 5 verses. It presents the story of the Riders of Elephants, when they marched toward Mecca to destroy the Holy Kaʿbah. God destroyed them by sending flocks of birds to pelt them with clay stones, until they became like eaten straw. This was one of the great signs of God which was not hidden from anyone. The people at the time—before the advent of Islam—chronicled this event and incorporated it in their poetry.

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أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِأَصْحابِ الْفِيلِ ﴿١﴾

(105:1) ***Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the Riders of Elephants?***

This is a rhetorical question which implies a negation. What is meant by "seeing" (*ruʾyah*) here is patent knowledge, which is compared to sensory observation for its clarity. The meaning is: "Do you not know what your Lord did to the Riders of Elephants?" This incident occurred the year the Prophet was born.

أَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ كَيْدَهُمْ فِي تَضْلِيلٍ ﴿٢﴾

(105:2) ***Did He not render their stratagems in loss*** **(taḍlīl)*?***

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Their stratagems were their ill-willed plot targeting Mecca, and their intent to destroy God's Sacred House. *Taḍlīl* is synonymous with *iḍlāl* (misguiding, leading astray). What is meant here is that God took their efforts off course so that they would not find their way to their intended goal. They set out to destroy the Kaʿbah, but ended up destroying themselves.

وَ أَرْسَلَ عَلَيْهِمْ طَيْراً أَبابِيلَ ﴿٣﴾

(105:3) ***And He sent against them flocks*** **(abābīl)** ***of birds,***

This verse and the next one interpret the last verse: *Did He not render their stratagems in loss?* (105:2). *Abābīl* is said to mean "separated groups, differentiated clusters" [such as squadrons of troops]. The meaning is: "God sent dispersed flocks of birds upon the Riders of Elephants."

تَرْمِيهِمْ بِحِجارَةٍ مِنْ سِجِّيلٍ ﴿٤﴾

(105:4) ***pelting them with stones of shale*** **(sijjīl).**

The flocks of birds pelted the Riders of Elephants with stones of hard clay. We already discussed the meaning of *sijjīl* in our exposition of Prophet Lot's story.[1]

فَجَعَلَهُمْ كَعَصْفٍ مَأْكُولٍ ﴿٥﴾

(105:5) ***Thus He made them like chewed-up*** **(maʾkūl)** ***straw*** **(ka-ʿaṣf).**

ʿAṣf means "leaves of crops." *Chewed-up straw* refers to such leaves the seeds of which are eaten, or husks that are emptied of kernels. There are two possible meanings here: (1) "After being struck by stones of dried clay, they turned into lifeless bodies." (2) "The hot stones burned them to their guts."

Some have interpreted *chewed-up straw* as leaves of crops blighted and eaten by worms, causing them to wither and die. There are further suggested interpretations for the verse which are not compatible with the Qur'an's language.

Examining Narrations

(1) It was the king of Yemen who sought to destroy the Kaʿbah. His name was Abrahah b. al-Ṣabāḥ al-Ashram. It is said that his *kunyah* (title) was Abū Yaksūm. According to al-Wāqidī, he was the grandfather of al-Najāshī [the king of Abyssinia] who lived during the time of God's Messenger.
After taking control of the kingdom in Yemen, he built a kaʿbah

1 See verses 11:82-83 and 15:74. (Trans.)

there and topped it with golden domes. He ordered his subjects to make a pilgrimage to it [every year], trying to match God's Sacred House [in Mecca]. A man from Banū Kinānah tribe traveled to Yemen and saw the house there. He also happened to squat there to answer the call of nature. When Abrahah came in and found the excrement there, he said, "Who has dared against me by doing such a thing? By my Christian faith, I will destroy that other House so that no one would ever make a pilgrimage to it."

He called for elephants, and told his people and his followers in Yemen to prepare for departure. The majority of his followers were from the tribes of ʿAkk, al-Ashʿar and Khathʿam. After journeying a bit, he sent a man from Banū Sulaym to call people to make a pilgrimage to the house that he had built. But his messenger was confronted and killed by a man from al-Ḥums tribe, which is also a branch of Banū Kinānah. That only enraged Abrahah further, so he pushed his contingent on.

He requested a guide from the people of Ṭāʾif, and they sent a man from Hudhayl tribe, called Nufayl. He went with them and guided them until they reached al-Mughammas, six miles from Mecca, where they camped. They sent their vanguards to Mecca, whereby the Quraysh scattered hither and thither into the mountaintops, saying, "We don't have the strength to fight such an army." No one remained in Mecca except ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib b. Hāshim and Shaybat b. ʿUthmān b. ʿAbd al-Dār. The former maintained his post of giving water [to the pilgrims], and the latter kept his stand as the custodian of the Kaʿbah. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib clasped onto the two doorjambs of the Kaʿbah and prayed:

لَاهُمَّ إِنَّ الْعَبْدَ يَمْـ ـنَعُ رَحْلَهُ فَامْنَعْ حِلَالَكَ

لَا يَغْلِبَنْ صَلِيبُهُمْ وَ مِحَالُهُمْ غَدْواً مِحَالَكَ

إِنْ كُنْتَ تَارِكَهُمْ وَ قِبْلَتَنَا فَأْمُرْ مَا بَدَا لَكَ

"My Lord! Everyone would protect their object;
Now we've settled at Your House, would You not protect?
Let not Your plan and power be wrecked

By the plots and crosses that by them are erect.
From reaching our *qiblah*, if You wish to neglect,
Then decree as You will, and no one shall object."[1]

The vanguards of Abrahah seized the camels of Quraysh, including two hundred camels belonging to ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib b. Hāshim. When he heard of this, he left Mecca to meet the army. Abrahah's door-guard was a man from al-Ashʿar tribe who knew ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib. He went in to seek permission for him to see the king. The door-guard said to Abrahah: "Your majesty! The chief of Quraysh has come to see you. He feeds the people in the towns and the beasts in the mountains." "Let him in," said Abrahah.

ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib was a sturdy handsome man. When Abū Yaksūm [Abrahah] saw him, he found him too noble to sit in a lower place than himself, yet did not want to seat him next to himself on his throne either. So he got off of his seat, sat on the ground, and seated ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib next to himself. "What can I do for you?" asked Abrahah.

"Give me my two hundred camels which your vanguards have usurped," ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib calmly replied.

"By God! I was quite impressed by you when I saw you," said Abū Yaksūm [Abrahah]. "But now that you've spoken, you've turned me off."

"And why is that, your majesty?"

"Because I've come here to demolish and destroy the House which gives you honor and strength among the Arabs; the House which sets you above and apart from the people; the House which is at the center of your religion and rituals. And on the side, I've taken two hundred camels of yours. Now, when I ask you what you want, you raise the issue of your camels, but make no appeal for your Holy House!"

"Your majesty! I spoke to you concerning what belongs to me. The House has its own Lord Who will defend it. I'm not in charge of that in any way."

1 There are more lines to ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib's poem, which is widely reported with some variations. What is presented here is a slightly more accurate and reliable version than the one quoted by the author from *Majmaʿ al-bayān*. (Ed.)

> Abū Yaksūm was taken aback. He ordered the camels to be returned to ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, who then left. The night passed over the army with a gloom overshadowing the stars. As if they were speaking to them, whispering that some catastrophe was imminent, and their souls sensed the impending doom…
>
> At sunrise, birds with rocks swarmed above the troops and began pelting them with stones. Each bird had a stone in its beak and a stone in each of its talons. As soon as one dropped its stones, it flew away, only to be replaced by another one. If a stone stuck one's belly, it would split it open. If it fell on a bone, it would melt and pierce it. Abū Yaksūm, struck by some stones, turned back and fled. In every land along his way, some part of his body fell off. Until when he finally reached Yemen, his body was completely in ruin. When he entered his town, his chest split open, his stomach cleft apart, and he died. However, none of the members of al-Ashʿar or Khathʿam tribes was struck…[1]

Author's comment: Narrations disagree widely about the specifics of the story. Interested readers should consult the extensive books of history and Prophetic biography (*sīrah*).

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, narrating the consensus of narrators.

Chapter 106

Quraysh (Quraysh)

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Verses 1-4

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 4 verses. It speaks about God's favor upon Quraysh tribe with respect to their two annual journeys. Then it commands them to monotheism and serving the Lord of the House.

Since the content of this sūrah somewhat relates to the content of Sūrah al-Fīl (Chapter 105), some Sunni scholars have held that the two of them actually compose a single chapter, just as is said about Sūrah al-Ḍuḥá and Sūrah al-Inshirāḥ (Chapters 93 and 94) based on the connection between them. This is also held to be the mainstream view among the Shias. However the evidence put forward for this view does not suffice to prove it.

The Sunnis proponents of this view rely on two pieces of evidence: (1) It is narrated that in Ubayy b. Kaʿb's manuscript of the Qur'an, these two sūrahs were not separated with "In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful" (*bism Allāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*). (2) It is narrated from ʿAmr b. Maymūn al-Azdī:

> Once I prayed the Sunset Prayer behind ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. In the first *rakʿah*, he recited Sūrah al-Tīn (Chapter 95), and in the second, he recited *Alam tara* (Chapter 105) and *li-īlāf Quraysh* (Chapter 106) without separating them with *In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful*.

The opponents of this view have rebutted as follows: (1) There are also narrations that Ubayy b. Kaʿb separated these two sūrahs in his manuscript with *In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful*. Therefore, the narrations conflict. (2) Assuming that the second narration is authentic, it is likely that the narrator simply did not hear ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb reciting *In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful*. Or perhaps

ᶜUmar recited it in his heart.

Additionally, these accounts contradict a Prophetic narration which says that God favored the Quraysh in seven ways, among which was: "a chapter of the Qur'an was revealed exclusively about them, which is Sūrah Quraysh." Finally, there are mass-transmitted (*mutawātir*) narrations which show that at the beginning of Chapter 106 there is *In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful*, marking a separation from the last chapter. Shia proponents of this view rely on the following narrations:

(1) Abū al-ᶜAbbās related from either Imams al-Bāqir or al-Ṣādiq: *Alam tara kayfa faᶜala Rabbuka* (Chapter 105) and *li-īlāf Quraysh* (Chapter 106) are a single sūrah.[1]

(2) Al-Mufaḍḍal b. Ṣāliḥ narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq: Do not recite two sūrahs in a single *rakᶜah*, except for *wa al-ḍuḥá* (Chapter 93) and *a-lam nashraḥ* (Chapter 94); and *alam tara kayfa* (Chapter 105) and *li-īlāf Quraysh* (Chapter 106).[2]

(3) Al-ᶜAlāʾ narrated from Zayd al-Shaḥḥām said: Once Imam al-Ṣādiq led the Morning Prayer for us, where he recited *wa al-ḍuḥá* (Chapter 93) and *a-lam nashraḥ* (Chapter 94) in one *rakᶜah*.[3]

Response: The first narration, by Abū ᶜAbbās, is weak because it suffers from an unconnected chain of transmission (*marfūᶜ*). The second one, by al-Mufaḍḍal, is the best evidence for the two chapters being two separate sūrahs, because it says, "Do not recite two sūrahs" and then mentions these sūrahs—Chapters 93 and 94, and Chapters 105 and 106—as an exception to that.

The third one, by Zayd al-Shaḥḥām, is also narrated slightly differently through two different chains of transmission which can be insightful:

(1) Ibn Muskān narrated from Zayd b. al-Shaḥḥām: Imam al-Sadiq led the prayer for us, and recited *wa al-ḍuḥá* (Chapter 93) and *a-lam nashraḥ* (Chapter 94).[4]

(2) Ibn Abī ᶜUmayr narrated from Zayd b. al-Shaḥḥām: Imam al-Ṣādiq led the prayer for us, where in the first *rakᶜah* he recited *wa al-ḍuḥá*

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1 *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*.

2 *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*, on the authority of al-ᶜAyyāshī. Al-Muḥaqqiq [al-Ḥilli] has narrated a similar account to this in his *al-Muᶜtabar*, on the authority of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Abī Naṣr's *al-Jāmiᶜ*, on the authority of al-Mufaḍḍal

3 *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*.

4 *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, via its chain of narration.

(Chapter 93), and in the second *a-lam nashraḥ* (Chapter 94).[1]

The latter narration—on the authority of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr—is an authentic narration which explicitly says that each sūrah was recited in a different *rakʿah*. This is contrary to Ibn Muskān's version, which has neither an explicit import (*ṣarāḥah*) nor an apparent one (*ẓuhūr*).[2] As with the third narration above on the authority of al-ʿAlāʾ, even though it apparently implies that the two chapters were recited in the same unit (*rakʿah*), its apparent import cannot stand the explicit text of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr's version. Some might argue that Ibn Abī ʿUmayr's narration pertains to an optional recommended prayer (*nāfilah*). However, this cannot be since he says that the Imam "led the prayer for us" (*ṣallá binā*). This explicitly indicates a congregational prayer, because optional recommended prayers are not performed in congregation.

In truth, if these narrations prove anything, it is only the permissibility of reciting both sūrahs—both Chapters 93 and 94, or both Chapters 105 and 106—in a single unit of an obligatory prayer. Such combining of two chapters in a single unit of an obligatory prayer is not permitted for other chapters. Supporting this is a narration where Dāwūd al-Raqqī says:

> When dawn broke, Imam al-Sadiq stood up and recited the two calls to prayer (*adhān* and *iqāmah*). Then he had me stand on his right side and started praying. In the first *rakʿah*, he recited Sūrah al-Fātiḥah (Chapter 1) and *wa al-ḍuḥá* (Chapter 93), and in the second he recited Sūrah al-Fātiḥah (Chapter 1) and *qul huwa Allāh aḥad* (Chapter 112). Then he performed the *qunūt* and *salām*,[3] and remained seated.[4]

لِإِيلافِ قُرَيْشٍ ۝١ إِيلافِهِمْ رِحْلَةَ الشِّتاءِ وَ الصَّيْفِ ۝٢

(106:1-2) ***For harmonizing*** **(li-īlāf)** ***for the Quraysh, propitiating***

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1 *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, on the authority of some of our companions.

2 These are semantic terms. If a statement has a single unequivocal meaning, then that meaning is called "explicit" (*ṣarīḥ*, *naṣṣ*). If it has multiple potential meanings but one of them springs to the mind first, then that meaning is called "apparent" (*ẓāhir*). The apparent can be overridden if there is some indication or evidence against it. (Ed.)

3 *Qunūt* is a part of the ritual prayer done while standing with raised hands. *Salām* is the last part of the ritual prayer. (Trans.)

4 Al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharāʾij*.

***them in winter and summer journeys* (riḥlah).**

According to al-Rāghib, *ilf* means "gathering with harmony." One of its derivatives is *ulfah* (affinity, intimacy, familiarity).[1]

Quraysh is the name of the Prophet's clan. They were the descendants of al-Naḍr b. Kanānah, who was called Quraysh. *Riḥlah*, according to *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, is the state of journeying on a *rāḥilah*, which means a strong camel. Here, *riḥlah* refers to how the Quraysh used to leave Mecca for trade journeys. The sanctuary of Mecca was a barren land, and they could not grow crops or raise farm animals. Therefore, they made a living through trade. Every year, they used to make two trips: one trip to Yemen in the winter; and one to the Levant in the summer. This was how they survived. And in the honor of the Sacred House, people respected them: they were safe on the road from highwaymen, and at home from raids.

For harmonizing* (li-īlāf) *for the Quraysh: The letter *lām* (for) at the beginning of this verse signifies justification (*taʿlīl*). The subject of this verse is God, Who created peace and security (*īlāf*) among the Quraysh.[2]

harmonizing for them in winter and summer journeys: This verse shows what God harmonized and facilitated for the Quraysh. The implied meaning is: "Because God has made it safe and smooth for the Quraysh to travel in summer and winter."

فَلْيَعْبُدُوا رَبَّ هٰذَا الْبَيْتِ ﴿٣﴾

(106:3) *So let them serve* (fal-yaʿbudū) *the Lord of this House,*

The letter *fāʾ* (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of this verse responds to a potential impression of either conditionality (*sharṭ*) or differentiation (*tafṣīl*). In the first case, the meaning would be: "If they do not serve Him for His other countless bounties, *then* they should serve

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1 *Al-Ṣiḥāḥ* says: "When one becomes familiar with and accustomed to a place, the verb is used as *alifa yaʾlafu alfan*. In the first person one may say: *ālaftu ūlifu īlāfan*. In its transitive form [when one creates affinity and comfort between another person and a place] one says: *ālafahu*." (Auth.)
More specifically in this context, *īlāf* means "creating peace and security" amongst the Quraysh. (Ed.)

2 The word *īlāf* implies a verb that takes two objects. The first one is *the Quraysh*, and the second is omitted but implied by the next verse. The second verse is a *badal* (alternative expression, substitute, apposition) for the first. (Auth.)

the Lord of this House because He has facilitated these two seasons for their journeys." In the second case, the meaning would be: "Whatever may be the circumstance, *then* they must serve the Lord of this House…" This would be similar to the usage of the letter *fā*ʾ in the verse: *And thus be patient* (fa-iṣbir) *for your Lord* (74:7).[1]

In sum, these three verses [106:1-3] say: "The Quraysh must worship the Lord of this House because He has made it safe for them to travel in the summer and the winter. As a result, they can make a living in security." This is the meaning that we can infer assuming that the chapter has a theme and context of its own, separate from the previous one. However, those who consider this sūrah to be a part and continuation of Sūrah al-Fīl (Chapter 105) have offered some alternative interpretations:

(1) The letter *lām* in *li-īlāf* (106:1) signifies a justification for something elided that is shown by the context.[2] The implied meaning is: "We did that to the Riders of Elephants as a blessing from Us upon the Quraysh, *in addition to* how We have blessed them in their journeys during the summer and winter." This amounts to saying: "Blessing after blessing." Thus, it is said that the letter *lām* here means *ilá* (to, toward), as narrated from al-Farrāʾ.

(2) The meaning is: "We did that to the Riders of Elephants so that the Quraysh may be safely established and secured in Mecca."

(3) The meaning is: "We did that in order to pull the Quraysh back to Mecca. That is because when Abrahah marched toward their town, they deserted it in fear of him. We destroyed him so that the Quraysh could return to Mecca and settle there in safety—and then Muḥammad may be born there, to be appointed later as a bearer of glad tidings and warnings to the people."

Comment: The problem with these views is whether one can deduce them from the theme and context of the chapter.

الَّذِی أَطْعَمَهُمْ مِنْ جُوعٍ وَ آمَنَهُمْ مِنْ خَوْفٍ ۝٤

1 That is, one must serve God unconditionally, without distinguishing between different circumstances. Similarly, verse 74:7 implies that one must always be patient for God's sake, regardless of any condition. (Ed.)

2 In other words, verse 106:1 is not a justification for what comes *after*—the command to worship God in verse 106:3—but it is a justification for the events mentioned *before*, in Chapter 105. (Ed.)

(106:4) ***Who has fed them against hunger, and secured them from fear.***

This verse points to two evident blessing and favor of God upon them, namely food and safety, as a result of facilitating their two journeys. They could live in a land that was infertile, and had safety while their neighbors did not. Therefore, they were commanded to worship the Lord of this House, Who managed their affairs in the best way.

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning *For harmonizing for the Quraysh, harmonizing for them* (106:1-2) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: This was revealed about the Quraysh because they made a living through making two journeys: one to Yemen in the winter, and one to the Levant in the summer. From Mecca, they used to take leather, nuts and seeds, and whatever sea traders would sell to them, such as spice. In the Levant, they would trade these for clothing, refined flour and grain. They used to get along with each other (*kānū yataʾallafūna*) on the path. They would travel in small groups, each group led by a chieftain from Quraysh. This was how they made a living. When God appointed His Prophet, they no longer had to do that, because people came in droves to the Prophet and made pilgrimage to the House. Thus God says: *So let them serve the Lord of this House, Who has fed them against hunger* (106:3-4), without needing to journey to the Levant. *And secured them from fear* (106:4): This refers to the dangers of the journey.

Author's comment: The latter part of this narration—" When God appointed His Prophet"—does not clearly fit the context of the verses. Perhaps this part is al-Qummī's words, which he has deduced from some narration from Ibn ʿAbbās.

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Chapter 107

al-Māʿūn (The Assistance)

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Verses 1-7

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

This sūrah was revealed in either Mecca or Medina, and consists of 7 verses. Some have said that half of it was revealed in Mecca and the other half in Medina. The chapter warns the hypocrites who put on a garb of religiosity, yet they bear the traits of hypocrites, such as making light of their ritual prayers, showing off, and withholding their charity. These actions are not reflective of someone who believes in the Day of retribution.

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أَ رَأَيْتَ الَّذِى يُكَذِّبُ بِالدِّينِ ﴿١﴾

(107:1) ***Have you seen the one who denies the retribution*** **(al-dīn)*?***

There are two possible interpretations for "seeing" (*ruʾyah*) in this verse: (1) eyesight; (2) knowledge. The verse is addressed to the Prophet in the sense that he is the receiver of the message. Therefore, it is meant for anyone who receives it. *Dīn* here means recompense on the Day of Judgment. So the verse is about those who deny the hereafter. Meanwhile, some exegetes have interpreted *dīn* as "religion."

فَذٰلِكَ الَّذِى يَدُعُّ الْيَتِيمَ ﴿٢﴾

(107:2) ***Then that is the one*** **(fa-dhālika)** ***who drives away*** **(yaduʿu, from daʿ)** ***the orphan,***

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Daʿ means "pushing away violently and harshly." The letter *fāʾ* (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of the verse implies a sense of conditionality. The effective meaning is: "Have you seen those who deny the retribution so that you would know their traits which stem from their denial? If you have not got to know their traits, *then* they are those who violently and

harshly repel the orphans. They do not fear the consequences of their evil acts. If they were not in denial of the retribution, they would have feared what they are doing; and if they had feared, they would have shown mercy to the orphans."

وَ لا يَحُضُّ عَلى طَعامِ الْمِسْكِينِ ﴿٣﴾

(107:3) *and does not urge* (yaḥuḍḍu from ḥaḍḍ) *the feeding* (ṭaʿām) *of the needy.*

Ḥaḍḍ means "encouraging, promoting, persuading." The one being urged is omitted in the verse. The implied meaning is: "And they do not urge *the people* to feed the needy." The verse says *does not urge* instead of "does not feed" because urging is more general. It is not limited to taking practical steps to feed the needy.[1] The verse literally says "food" (*ṭaʿām*) instead of "feeding" (*iṭʿām*). Exegetes have offered two explanations for this expression: (1) By saying "the food of the needy" [instead of "feeding the needy"] the verse implies that this food almost belongs to them, as their right. This can be compared with the verse: *the beggar and the deprived have a right in their wealth* (51:9). (2) "Food" here means "feeding."

فَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّينَ ﴿٤﴾ الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلاتِهِمْ ساهُونَ ﴿٥﴾

(107:4-5) *So shame* (fa-wayl) *on those who pray—those who are mindless* (sāhūn) *of their prayers,*

Sāhūn is synonymous with *ghāfilūn* (heedless, inadvertent). This refers to those who do not give much importance to their prayers. They do not care if they miss some or all of the prayer times, or if they pray after the ideal time, and so on.

The letter *fā*ʾ (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of verse 107:4 shows that these verses are a consequence and conclusion to the ones before. Hence, *those who pray* in these verses are matched with *one who denies the retribution* (107:1) as an application of it. The verses show that there is an element of hypocrisy in such people, for they deny the retribution in practice even though they feign faith.

الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُراؤُنَ ﴿٦﴾

1 In other words, the verse is about those who neither feed the needy themselves, nor encourage and promote others to do so. (Ed.)

(107:6) ***those who show off***

They perform acts of worship to be seen by the people. Therefore, they act for the people, not for God.

وَ يَمْنَعُونَ الْماعُونَ ۝٧

(107:7) ***and withhold assistance*** **(al-māʿūn, from ʿawn).**

Māʿūn is a general term for anything that can help (*yuʿīnu, from ʿawn*) someone take care of their needs in life—like giving a loan, showing benevolence, or lending household utensils. The various interpretations of exegetes for *māʿūn* can be traced back to this meaning.

Examining Narrations

(1) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *Have you seen the one who denies the retribution?* (107:1): This was revealed about Abū Jahl and the disbelievers among the Quraysh. *Those who are mindless* (sāhūn) *of their prayers* (107:5): What is meant [by *sāhūn*] here is *tārikūn* (abandoner, deserter, renouncer), because otherwise everyone's mind wanders in prayer.

(2) Concerning *Those who are mindless of their prayers* (107:5) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: That is delaying the prayer from its prime time without any excuse.[1]

(3) Imam ʿAlī said: No deed is more beloved to God than the ritual prayer. Do not let any worldly concern distract you from its times. For indeed God has censured some groups of people by saying: *Those who are mindless* (sāhūn) *of their prayers* (107:5). It [*sāhūn*] means those who are heedless of their prayers and are not committed to the prayer times.[2]

(4) Once Imam al-Kāẓim was asked about *those who are mindless of their prayers* (107:5). He said: It means *taḍyīʿ* (missing, losing, letting it slip).[3]

Author's comment: The ideas mentioned in the above hadiths can also be found in further narrations.

(5) Concerning *those who show off* (107:6) [Imam] ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib

1 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*.

2 *Al-Khiṣāl*, part of the hadith of 400.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Fuḍayl.

said: They show off with their prayers.[1]

(6) Concerning *and withhold assistance* (al-māʿūn) (107:7) the Prophet said: That is what people commonly lend to one another, such as ax, pot, pail and so on.[2]

(7) Concerning *and withhold assistance* (107:7) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: This is about giving loans, offering a helping hand, or lending household utensils. It also includes *zakāt* (poor-rate, prescribed religious tax).[3]

Author's comment: There are also Sunni narrations which interpret *māʿūn* as *zakāt*, such as the next one.

(8) [Imam] ʿAlī said: *Māʿūn* is the obligatory *zakāt*. They show off with their prayer and withhold their *zakāt*.[4]

(9) [Imam] ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib said: I heard the Messenger of God saying: "A Muslim is a brother of a Muslim. When he meets him, he greets him with *salām*; and when he returns a greeting, he returns it with one better than it. And he does not withhold *al-māʿūn* [from his brother]."

I asked: "O Messenger of God, what is *al-māʿūn* (help, assistance)?"

He said: "Things like stoneware (*ḥajar*), ironware (*ḥadīd*) and water."[5]

Author's comment: Another Prophetic narration further interprets *ḥadīd* (lit. iron) as "copper pots" and "iron axes"; and interprets *ḥajar* (lit. stone) as "stone pots."

1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim and al-Bayhaqī's *al-Sunan*.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Abū Nuʿaym, al-Daylamī and Ibn ʿAsākir, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abū Baṣīr, part of a longer hadith.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*.

5 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Qāniʿ.

Chapter 108

al-Kawthar (The Abundance)

Verses 1-3

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 3 verses. It is a description of how God has graced and favored the Prophet by giving him the *kawthar*, and comforts his noble soul by telling him that it is his enemy who is childless. This is the shortest sūrah of the Qur'an. While narrations disagree over where it was revealed, it appears to have been revealed in Mecca. Some exegetes have suggested that it was revealed twice, as a way of reconciling the narrations.

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إِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ ﴿١﴾

(108:1) ***Indeed We have given you abundance*** **(al-kawthar).**

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> *Kawthar* (based on the verbal pattern *fawʿal*) means "something that is embedded with abundance." Here it means "abundant good."

Exegetes have disagreed enormously over the meaning of *kawthar*. Here is a list of their interpretations:

(1) A stream in paradise.
(2) The Prophet's fountain in paradise or on the plains of Resurrection.
(3) The Prophet's children.
(4) His Companions and followers, until the Day of Resurrection.
(5) The scholars of his nation.
(6) The Qur'an and its plentiful merits.
(7) Prophethood.
(8) The way the Qur'an was made easy [to receive, recite, understand and/or implement], and the lightening of the divine law [given to him, compared to the previous codes of law].

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(9) Islam.
(10) Monotheism (*tawḥīd*).
(11) Knowledge and wisdom.
(12) The Prophet's merits.
(13) The *praiseworthy station* (17:79).
(14) The light in the Prophet's heart.

Comment: According to some exegetes, the list goes on to 26 views. While the first two interpretations are deduced from the narrations, the others involve some arbitrary impositions of meaning on the verse. We can deduce the verse's meaning in the light of the last verse in the chapter: *Indeed it is your insulter who is cut-off* (108:3). The word "cut-off" (*abtar*) apparently means "a person whose lineage ends with himself, a childless person, one who has no progeny." Moreover, the verse is apparently mentioned as a stylistic inversion [implying the meaning of "on the contrary"]. Therefore, the current verse specifically refers to the abundant progeny of the Prophet. That is the *kawthar* which was given to him. Alternatively, it can mean abundant good in general, where having abundant descendants is a part of that. Otherwise [without the sense of progeny], it would not make sense to present the last verse as the fact of the matter.

***Indeed We have given you* (aʿṭaynāka, from iʿṭāʾ)…:** The verse has a tone of showing favor upon the Prophet. That is why it refers to God using the first person plural, indicating greatness and glorification. The verse also comforts the noble soul of the Prophet, emphasized by the word *Indeed*, and by using the verb *iʿtāʾ* (to give, to grant, to bestow upon), which typically denotes granting ownership.

The verse suggests that the children of Fāṭimah count as the Prophet's lineage. This is also one of the forecasts of the Qur'an, for God multiplied the Prophet's descendants [through her] after him, to the point that no other lineage outnumbers them, even though they have widely persecuted and frequently massacred.

فَصَلِّ لِرَبِّكَ وَانْحَرْ ۝٢

(108:2) *So pray to your Lord, and mark the throat* (inḥar, from naḥr).

The letter *fāʾ* (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of this verse shows that it is stated as a conclusion to the last verse: *Indeed We have given you abundance* (108:1). Since the last verse has a tone of showing favor upon

the Prophet, the commands in this verse—to *pray* and to *mark the throat*—are expressions of gratitude for God's blessing. The meaning is: "Since We have gifted you with the abundance, be grateful to it through praying and marking the throat."[1]

According to Sunni and Shia narrations from the Prophet and Imam ʿAlī, as well as Shia narrations from Imam al-Sadiq and other Imams, what is meant by *naḥr* here is "raising the hands to the neck when saying *Allāh akbar* in the ritual prayer." Other suggested views are:

(1) Pray the Eid prayer [on the Day of Sacrifice], and offer a camel.
(2) Stand upright after bowing (*rukūʿ*) and raising your head.

إِنَّ شَانِئَكَ هُوَ الْأَبْتَرُ ﴿٣﴾

(108:3) *Indeed it is your insulter* (shāniʾaka) *who is cut-off* (al-abtar).

Shāniʾ is synonymous with *mubghiḍ* (enemy, opponent, one who dislikes another). *Abtar* means "one who has no children."[2] *Your insulter* refers to al-ʿĀṣ b. Wāʾil. Two other suggested interpretations for the word *abtar* are:

(1) One who is cut off from all good.
(2) One who is cut off from his people.

Comment: Based on these interpretations, God revealed this chapter to tell the insulter that it was he—and not the Prophet—who is cut off from all good [or from his people]. However, these views are contrary to *mustafīḍah* (multiple, diffused, numerous) narrations, which shall be presented below. According to the narrations the chapter was revealed with reference to someone who mocked the Prophet for being childless after the death of his two sons Qāsim and ʿAbd-Allāh.

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1 *Inḥar* is often translated as "sacrifice," referring specifically to offering a camel. The root *naḥr* literally means "the area under the neck and above the chest." Camels were commonly slaughtered by first piercing a knife or lance in their throat. Sacrifice is a plausible meaning here since it was a major act of worship and a common expression of gratitude. Meanwhile, since this verse is the sole Qur'anic usage of this root, the meaning of *inḥar* cannot be deduced from or verified by other verses. That is why the author has resorted to the narrations. Raising the hands in prayer is also a plausible meaning since it is congruous with the first command. (Ed.)

2 More literally: "one who has no continuation." (Ed.)

Examining Narrations

(1) Abū Bishr said: Saʿīd b. Jubayr narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās: "*Kawthar* is the good which God gave the Prophet." I asked Saʿīd b. Jubayr, "Some people claim that it is a stream in paradise." He replied, "The heavenly stream is one of the good things that God bestowed upon the Prophet."[1]

(2) When this sūrah—*Indeed We have given you abundance…* (108:1-3)—was revealed to the Prophet, the Prophet asked Gabriel, "What is this sacrifice (*naḥīrah*) which I have been commanded to?" "It is not a sacrifice," said Gabriel. "God is commanding you to raise your hands beside your neck when you are about to begin the ritual prayer and say *Allāh akbar*, and also when you bow and raise your head after bowing. This is indeed our prayer, the prayer of the angels in all seven heavens. Everything has an adornment, and the adornment of the ritual prayer is raising the hands when saying *Allāh akbar*."[2]

(3) The Prophet said: Raising the hands [in prayer] is [a gesture of] humbleness, as God says: *yet they neither humbled themselves to their Lord, nor did they entreat [God for mercy]* (23:76).[3]

(4) Imam ʿAlī said: The meaning of *naḥr* (108:2) is raising the hands to the *naḥr* (neck, throat) in the ritual prayer.[4]

(5) Concerning *So pray to your Lord* (108:2) Imam al-Bāqir said: "That is the ritual prayer." Concerning *and mark the throat* (108:2) he said: "It means raising the hands at the beginning of the prayer."[5]

(6) Regarding *So pray to your Lord, and mark the throat* (inḥar, from naḥr) (108:2) Ibn ʿAbbās said: God revealed to His Messenger: "Raise your hands next to your throat when you proclaim *Allāh*

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Bukharī, Ibn Jarīr, and al-Ḥākim.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Ḥākim, Ibn Mardawayh and al-Bayhaqī's *al-Sunan*, from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*. This is also related in *Majmaʿ al-bayān* from the Imam, on the authority of al-Muqātil on the authority of al-Asbagh b. Nubātah. It then adds: "Al-Thaʿlabī and al-Wāḥidī have also reported it in their books of *tafsīr*."

4 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, narrated from all his pure descendants.

5 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Jarīr.

akbar for the ritual prayer." That is the meaning of *naḥr*.[1]

(7) Concerning *So pray to your Lord, and mark the throat* (108:2) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: It is raising your hands next to your face.[2]

(8) Ibn ʿAbbās said: The eldest child of the Messenger of God was al-Qāsim. Then came Zaynab, ʿAbd-Allāh, Umm Kulthūm, Fāṭimah, and finally Ruqayyah. The first of his children to die in Mecca was al-Qāsim, followed by ʿAbd-Allāh. At that point, al-ʿĀs b. Wāʾil al-Sahmī said, "His lineage has been cut off, so he is *abtar* (cut-off, childless)." Thus God revealed: *Indeed it is your insulter who is cut-off* (108:3).[3]

(9) [Imam] Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad narrated from his father: Al-Qāsim, the son of God's Messenger, died in Mecca. When the Messenger of God was coming back from his funeral, he came across al-ʿĀs b. Wāʾil and his son ʿAmr. When he [al-ʿĀs] saw the Messenger of God, he said, "Indeed I shall mock him." So al-ʿĀs b. Wāʾil said, "He has certainly become *abtar* (cut-off, childless)." Thus God revealed: *Indeed it is your insulter who is cut-off* (108:3).[4]

(10) Al-Suddī said: When a man's son died, the Quraysh would say, "So-and-so is cut off (*batara*)." So when the Prophet's son died, al-ʿĀs b. Wāʾil said, "He is cut off," where *abtar* means *fard* (solo, alone, odd).[5]

Author's comment: There are also other individuals who are identified as the *insulter* (108:3) in the narrations, including: Walīd b. Mughīrah, Abū Jahl, ʿUqbat b. Abī Muʿayṭ, and Kaʿb b. al-Ashraf. However, what we quoted above [that it was al-ʿĀs b. Wāʾil] is more reliable, and is also confirmed by the next narration.

(11) Part of Imam al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī's debate with ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ was: You

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of ʿUmar b. Yazīd. Similar narrations to this are reported from the Imam on the authorities of ʿAbd-Allāh b. Sinān and Jamīl.

3 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Saʿd and Ibn ʿAsākir, on the authority of al-Kalbī, on the authority of Abū Sāliḥ.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of al-Zubayr b. Bakkār and Ibn ʿAsākir.

5 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

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were born to a shared bed.[1] Several men from the Quraysh claimed you, including Abū Sufyān b. Ḥarb, al-Walīd b. al-Mughīrah, ʿUthmān b. al-Ḥārith, al-Naḍr b. al-Ḥārith b. Kaladah, and al-ʿĀṣ b. Wāʾil. Each of them believed that you were his son. But the one who dominated the others in his claim was the one with the basest family background, the most wicked social status, and the most adulterous record. Then you stood up to deliver a sermon and declared, "I am going to mock Muḥammad." And al-ʿĀṣ b. Wāʾil said, "Muḥammad is cut-off (*abtar*): he has no sons. Once he dies, he slips into oblivion." So God revealed: *Indeed it is your insulter who is cut-off* (108:3).[2]

(12) Regarding *Indeed We have given you* al-kawthar (108:1) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *Kawthar* is a stream in paradise which God gave to Muḥammad in exchange for taking away his son Ibrāhīm.

Author's comment: There are a few problems with this narration: (1) It does not name the Imam (*muḍmar*). (2) It has no chain of transmission (*mursal*). (3) It contradicts the other narrations. Nevertheless, interpreting *kawthar* as a heavenly stream does not conflict with interpreting it as "abundant good," as we saw in the narration from Ibn Jubayr [number 1].

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1 That is, it is not clear who your father was. (Trans.)

2 *Al-Iḥtijāj*.

Chapter 109

al-Kāfirūn (The Unbelievers)

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Verses 1-6

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 6 verses. It orders the Prophet to publicly dissociate himself from the disbelievers' religion, and to foretell that they will never embrace his. Therefore, neither will his religion spill over to them, nor will their religion spill over to him. He will never worship what they worship, and they will never worship what he worships. Hence, they should despair of any compromise or remission from the Prophet.

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Exegetes differ over whether the chapter was revealed in Mecca or Medina, but its theme matches the Meccan chapters.

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿١﴾

(109:1) ***Say: O disbelievers*** **(al-kāfirūn)*!***

Apparently the definite article *al-* (the) in *al-kāfirūn* [not translated in the English] refers to a specific and known group of disbelievers, not to all disbelievers. This can be confirmed by the subsequent verses, where the Prophet is ordered to declare to them his dissociation from their religion, and their rejection of his.[1]

لا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٢﴾

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(109:2) ***I will not serve what*** **(mā)** ***you serve*** **(taʿbudūna).**

From this verse on, the sūrah consists of the script given to the Prophet.

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1 That is, the verses are addressed to a specific group of people following a specific set of beliefs. (Trans.)

What you serve refers to the idols that they used to worship.[1]

I will not* (lā) *serve…: This is in the future tense, because the negative particle *lā* (not) negates the future, just as the negative particle *mā* (not) negates the present. The meaning is: "I shall never worship the idols that you are worshiping today."

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وَلا أَنتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ ﴿٣﴾

(109:3) *And you will not serve what* (mā) *I serve.*

This is also in the future tense. That is, the verse forecasts that the disbelievers in question will never enter the monotheistic religion in future. Adding the command *Say* (109:1) at the beginning of the sūrah to these two verses [109:2-3], the meaning is: "God has ordered me to continue serving Him forever, and to foretell to you that you will never worship Him. Therefore, it is not ever possible to find a common religious ground between us." Hence, this verse is similar in meaning to: *The word has been realized against most of them; they shall not believe* (36:7); *As for the faithless, it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them, they will not have faith* (2:6). It would have been more appropriate for the verse to use the Arabic particle *man* (who) instead of *mā* (what). However, the latter is used for parallelism with the previous verse: *I will not serve what* (mā) *you serve* (109:2).

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وَلا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَّا عَبَدتُّمْ ﴿٤﴾ وَلا أَنتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ ﴿٥﴾

(109:4-5) *And I will not be a servant of what* (mā) *you have served. And you will not serve what* (mā) *I serve.*

The content of the previous two sentences is repeated for emphasis. A similar repetition is seen in these verses: *Nay! You will come to know. Again, nay! You will come to know* (102:3-4); *Perish he, the way he appraised! Again, perish he! The way he appraised* (74:19-20).

Some have said: The particle *mā* in these two verses serves to turn the

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1 There is an omitted pronoun at the end of the word *taʿbudūna* (you serve), indicating the object of their worship. It is omitted because it is indicated by the relative pronoun *mā* (what), and to maintain the rhyme of the verses. The same is true for the objects of the verbs at the end of the next three verses: *aʿbudu* (I serve; 109:3), *ʿabadtum* (you have served; 109:4), *aʿbudu* (I serve; 109:5). (Auth.)

verb that follows it into a verbal noun (called *maṣdariyyah*). The meaning would be: "And I will not be a servant of your service. And you will not serve my service."[1] Hence, the four verses [109:2-5] together say: "We have nothing in common: neither in the object that we serve [109:2-3], nor in the manner of our practice [109:4-5]. That is because my object of devotion is God, while yours is the idols. And my way of service is what God has ordained for me, while your way of service is what you have invented out of ignorance and false ascription [to God]." Accordingly, these two verses [109:4-5] are not repeated merely for emphasis.

However, this interpretation is far from what springs to the mind from the verses. In our examination of narrations we shall present another explanation for the repetition in these verses, which is quite subtle.

لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ ﴿٦﴾

(109:6) ***To you be*** **(lakum)** ***your religion, and to me*** **(lī)** ***my religion*** **(dīn).**

This reiterates what was said before: that there is no commonality between the two parties. The letter *lām* [in *lakum* and *lī*] shows exclusive affiliation and possession (*ikhtiṣāṣ*). The meaning is: "Your religion—which is the worship of idols—exclusively belongs to you and does not include me. Similarly, my religion exclusively belongs to me and does not include you." The verse should not be construed to mean that it is permissible to adopt whatever religion one likes, or that the Prophet never opposed their religion after that. That would be against the call to the truth which is at the core of the Qur'an's mission.

Two other suggested views are:

(1) The word *dīn* in this verse means *jazā'* (payment, compensation, reward). The meaning is: "To you belongs your recompense, and to me belongs my recompense."

(2) There is an omitted *muḍāf* (annexed noun, construct noun) in the verse. The implied meaning is: "To you be *the reward of* your religion, and to me be *the reward of* my religion."

Comment: Both views are far from what springs to the mind at first.

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1 In other words, the verses are about one's *way* of worship, not one's *object* of worship. (Ed.)

Examining Narrations

(1) Al-Walīd b. al-Mughīrah, al-ʿĀṣ b. Wāʾil, al-Aswad b. al-Muṭṭalib and Umayyah b. Khalaf met the Messenger of God and said: "O Muḥammad! Here's an offer: We will worship what you worship, and you worship what we worship, so we'll all be in the same boat. This way, if our path is more correct than yours, then you will have some share of it. And if your path is more correct than ours, then we will have a share of it." Then God revealed: *Say: O disbelievers! I will not serve what you serve* (109:1-2), to the end of the sūrah.[1]

(2) Once Abū Shākir asked Abū Jaʿfar al-Aḥwal about the verses: *Say: O disbelievers! I will not serve what you serve. And you will not serve what I serve. And I will not be a servant of what you have served. And you will not serve what I serve* (109:1-5). He asked: "Does a wise speaker speak like this, repeating himself again and again?" Abū Jaʿfar al-Aḥwal did not have an answer to that.

When he went to Medina, he asked the question to Imam al-Ṣādiq. The Imam said: "The context of revelation of these verses and their repetition was that the Quraysh told the Messenger of God: 'You worship our gods for a year, and we will worship your god for a year. Then you worship our gods for a year, and we will worship your god for a year.' So God replied to them in the same manner. In response to 'You worship our gods for a year,' He said, *Say: O disbelievers! I will not serve what you serve* (109:1-2). In response to 'We will worship your god for a year,' He said, *And you will not serve what I serve* (109:3) In response to 'Then you worship our gods for a year,' He said, *And I will not be a servant of what you have served* (109:4). And in response to 'We will worship your god for a year,' He said, *And you will not serve what I serve. To you be your religion, and to me my religion* (109:5-6)."

So Abū Jaʿfar al-Aḥwal returned to Abū Shākir [in Kūfah] and told him this, at which point Abū Shākir retorted, "This must have been carried by the camels from Hejaz."[2]

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Ibn al-Anbarī's *al-Maṣāḥif*, on the authority of Saʿīd b. Mīnāʾ, the freedman of Abū al-Bakhtarī. A similar account to this is narrated from Ibn Mīnāʾ by al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī in *al-Amālī*, on the authority of a number of his companions.

2 *Tasfīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of his father, on the authority of Ibn Abī ʿUmayr.

Author's comment: The Quraysh repeated themselves to indicate a continuous cycle of worshiping their gods for a year, and then worshiping God for a year.

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Chapter 110

al-Naṣr (The Divine Help)

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Verses 1-3

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

This sūrah was revealed in Medina and consists of 3 verses. It promises the Prophet divine assistance and victory, and that he will see the people embracing Islam, group after group. It commands him to glorify God, praise Him, and seek forgiveness from Him when that happens. The chapter was revealed in Medina after the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah and before the conquest of Mecca, as we shall deduce below.

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إِذا جاءَ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ وَ الْفَتْحُ ﴿١﴾

(110:1) ***When* (idhā)** ***Allah's help and victory come,***

The word *idhā* apparently indicates a future event. Thus the verse is prophesizing what has not yet happened—namely, divine aid and victory—in order to comfort the heart of the Prophet. This is one of the glad tidings of the Qur'an to the Prophet, and one of its miracles of foreshadowing future.

Here are two suggested interpretations for the verse:

(1) The definite forms of the words *help and victory* indicate genus, thus referring to all instances when God aided His Prophet against his enemies, when He made His religion triumph over theirs. The verse applies to all of the Prophet's battles, the conversion of the Anṣār (Medinan Supporters), and the conversion of the people of Yemen.

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Comment: This interpretation is not plausible because it does not match the next verse: *and you see the people entering Allah's religion in throngs* (110:2).

(2) The verse refers to the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah, which God also

called a "victory" (*fatḥ*): *Indeed We have inaugurated for you a clear victory* (48:1).

Comment: Again, the content of the next verse is not compatible with this view.

The clearest interpretation for *help and victory* in this verse is the conquest of Mecca, which was the greatest victory of the Prophet in his lifetime. It was a dazzling display of divine aid, through which the edifice of polytheism in the Arabian Peninsula crumbled.

This interpretation can be confirmed by the promise of *a mighty help* (48:3) in the verses revealed in Ḥudaybiyyah: *Indeed We have inaugurated for you a clear victory, that Allah may forgive your earlier and later sins, may perfect His blessing upon you, and may guide you on a straight path; and that Allah may help you with a mighty help* (48:1-3). It is most likely that the promise of *a mighty help* in these verses—which were revealed in Ḥudaybiyyah—refers to God's support of His Prophet to defeat the Quraysh and conquer Mecca only two years after Ḥudaybiyyah.

This is a more plausible interpretation of the verse than the peaceful conversion of the people of Yemen to the Prophet's call without bloodshed. What is most consistent and apparent is to say that *help and victory* refer to God's assistance of His Prophet against the Quraysh in the conquest of Mecca. This means that the sūrah was revealed after the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah and after Sūrah al-Fatḥ (Chapter 48), but before the conquest of Mecca.

وَ رَأَيْتَ النَّاسَ يَدْخُلُونَ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ أَفْواجاً ﴿٢﴾

(110:2) ***and you see the people entering Allah's religion in throngs* (afwājan)**

Al-Rāghib says:

"*Fawj* means a group of people that are moving quickly. Its plural is *afwāj*."

The meaning is: "The people will enter God's religion group after group." What is meant by *Allah's religion* is Islam, as per the verse: *Indeed the religion with Allah is submission* (al-islām) (3:19).

فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَ اسْتَغْفِرْهُ إِنَّهُ كانَ تَوَّاباً ﴿٣﴾

(110:3) ***then glorify your Lord with praise, and plead to Him for forgiveness. Indeed He is the All-Relenter.***

There are two aspects to *Allah's help and victory* (110:1): (1) The defeat and degradation of polytheism. (2) The triumph and exaltation of monotheism. Alternatively: (1) The nullification and destruction of falsehood. (2) The confirmation and establishment of the truth. Either way, what is compatible with the first aspect is to *glorify* God, which means proclaiming Him clear of all imperfection. What corresponds to the second aspect, which is a blessing, is to *praise* and extol Him. That is why the Prophet is given the twofold command: *then glorify your Lord with praise*.

There is also another way of looking at the three commands in this verse: to glorify God, to praise Him, and to ask Him for forgiveness. It behooves the servants to remember their Lord through His attributes of perfection, and to remind themselves of their shortcomings and dependency. The fall of Mecca relieved the Prophet from much strain that he had to undertake to remove falsehood and sever the roots of corruption. That is why he was ordered to remember: (1) God's majesty, which amounts to glorification (*tasbīḥ*); (2) God's beauty, which amounts to praise (*taḥmīd*); and (3) his own weakness and dependence upon his Lord, which is represented by asking forgiveness. This way the Prophet would complete his gratitude toward His Lord.

… and plead to Him for forgiveness…: Given that the Prophet is already forgiven [that is, his intrinsic deficiencies are already covered by God], what is meant here is pleading for the *continuation* of God's forgiveness and coverage. This is because one is in need of the *continuation* of forgiveness as one is in need of its *initiation*. The reader should reflect on this. We already had a discussion on the meaning of the forgiveness of sins.[1]

… Indeed He is the All-Relenter: This statement justifies the previous command to seek forgiveness. It implies encouragement and emphasis.

Examining Narrations

(1) When this sūrah was revealed, the Prophet recited it to his Companions, which made them happy and hopeful. When ʿAbbās heard it, he wept.
"What makes you cry, my uncle?" asked the Prophet.
"I think it harbingers your death, O Messenger of God!"

1 See volume 12, pp. 191ff of the English translation, under verses 5:116-120. Note that "forgiveness" is the literal translation in this verse. For more on God's forgiveness of the Prophet, see the author's discussion on verse 48:2. (Ed.)

"That is indeed as you say," the Prophet confirmed.
He lived [only] two years after that, and was never seen smiling or jubilant again.[1]

Author's comment: Many narrations convey this meaning, though with different wordings. Concerning the relevance of the verses to the Prophet's demise, it is said that the verses convey a notion of the Prophet's efforts and troubles coming to an end, and his mission reaching its perfection. And once something reaches its apex, then waning is next.

(2) Umm Salamah said: Near the end of his life, the Messenger of God would not stand or sit, or enter or exit, unless he said, "Glory be to God with praise. I seek God's forgiveness, and turn to Him (*subḥān Allāh wa bi-ḥamdihi, astaghfiru Allāh wa atūbu ilayhi*)." We asked him about this, and he said, "I have been commanded to do so." Then he recited [the sūrah]: *When Allah's help and victory come…* (110:1-3).[2]

Author's comment: There are more narrations which convey the same idea, although they differ on the Prophet's exact wording.

(3) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: The first sūrah to be revealed was: *In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful. Read, in the name of your Lord* (Chapter 96), and the last sūrah to be revealed was *When Allah's help and victory come* (Chapter 110)."[3]

Author's comment: Perhaps, what is meant here is the last sūrah to be revealed in its entirety, as some scholars have suggested.

(4) When the Messenger of God made peace with the Quraysh in the year of Ḥudaybiyyah, one of the conditions was that anyone who wanted, could pledge allegiance to the Messenger of God. So Khuzāʿah tribe allied with the Messenger of God, and Banū Bakr tribe allied with Quraysh. There had been a long-standing feud between these two tribes.
Eventually, a fight broke out between Banū Bakr and Khuzāʿah. Quraysh supplied weapons to Banū Bakr, and some of them fought alongside their allies secretly under the cover of night. Among those who personally joined and aided Banū Bakr against

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of Muqātil.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

3 *Al-ʿUyūn*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of al-Ḥusayn b. Khālid, from Imam al-Riḍā, from his father.

Khuzāʿah were ʿIkrimah b. Abī Jahl and Suhayl b. ʿAmr.
Then ʿAmr b. Sālim al-Khuzāʿī rode to the Messenger of God in Medina. That was part of what sparked the conquest of Mecca. He arrived before the Messenger of God while he was in the mosque, surrounded by the people. There he [ʿAmr b. Sālim] recited [in impromptu verse]:

لَاهُمَّ إِنِّی نَاشِدٌ مُحَمَّداً حِلْفَ أَبِينَا وَ أَبِيهِ الْأَتْلَدَا

إِنَّ قُرَيْشاً أَخْلَفُوكَ الْمَوْعِدَا وَ نَقَضُوا مِيثَاقَكَ الْمُؤَكَّدَا

وَ قَتَلُونَا رُكَّعاً وَ سُجَّدا

O God, I adjure Muḥammad and avow
By the pledge of our fathers, right here and now:
Indeed the Quraysh have broken their vow,
Though they promised to keep it a sacred cow;
They slew us in a state of prostration and bow.

"No need to say more, ʿAmr," said the Messenger of God. The Prophet rose right away and went to [his wife] Maymūnah's house, and told her: "Pour me some water." As he was taking a ritual bath (*ghusl*) he said: "May I not be aided [by God] if I do not aid Banū Kaʿb," referring to the clan of ʿAmr b. Sālim.
Then Budayl b. Warqāʾ al-Khuzāʿī headed out with a contingent of the Khuzāʿah. When they reached the Prophet, they told him what had befallen them, and how the Quraysh had helped Banū Bakr against them. Then they left and returned to Mecca. The Prophet told the people: "It is as if I see Abū Sufyān has come to you to renew the treaty and extend its term. But he shall be intercepted by Budayl b. Warqāʾ." And indeed Budayl and his men encountered Abū Sufyān at ʿUsfān [between Mecca and Medina]. The Quraysh had sent him to the Prophet to renew the treaty.
When Abū Sufyān met Budayl, he said: "Where have you come from, Budayl?"
He said: "I took the coastal route, and came through this valley."

"You didn't visit Muḥammad?"
"No," Budayl confirmed.
When Budayl proceeded to Mecca, Abū Sufyān said [to his companions]: "If he has indeed been to Medina, his camel would have fed on its dates." So he went to where Budayl's camel had been kneeling, examined its droppings, and found date-pits in it. "I swear to God," he concluded, "Budayl went to see Muḥammad!"
Then Abū Sufyān traveled to the Messenger of God, and told him: "Muḥammad, save the blood of your people, grant immunity to the Quraysh, and extend our term [of peace]!"
"Have you broken the treaty, Abū Sufyān?"
"Of course not!"
So the Prophet said: "If so, then we stand by what we agreed on."
Abū Sufyān left and saw Abū Bakr. He told him: "Grant immunity to the Quraysh!"
Abū Bakr said: "Shame on you! Against the will of the Messenger of God?"
Abū Sufyān then proceeded to ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, and the same conversation transpired. So he left, and went to see Umm Ḥabībah. As he was about to sit down on a rug, she bent over and rolled it up. "My daughter," he said, "do you not see me worthy of even sitting on this rug?!"
"Absolutely not!" she confirmed. "This rug belongs to the Messenger of God. You cannot sit on it since you are a filthy polytheist."
Then he left and went to Fāṭimah. He said: "O daughter of the chief of the Arabs! Won't you grant immunity to the Quraysh and extend its term, so that you may be the most respected lady among the people?"
She said: "My immunity is that of God's Messenger."
"Would you tell your sons to give immunity to the people?"
"By God," she said, "my sons are not old enough to give immunity. Besides, no one would cross the Messenger of God in giving immunity."
Then he turned to ʿAlī: "O Abā al-Ḥasan! I find myself trapped. Give me some advice!"
"You are an elder of Quraysh. Go stand at the entrance of the mosque, and grant immunity to the Quraysh [yourself]. Then return to your land."

"Do you think that will help at all?"
"No, by God I don't think so," said ʿAlī, "but I don't see any other alternative for you."
So Abū Sufyān stood up in the mosque and said: "O people! The Quraysh is under my immunity!" Then he mounted his camel and left.
When he reached the Quraysh, they asked him, "What did you do?"
He told them the story, and they said: "By God! If only ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib had added that he was mocking you. How can what you said have any effect?!"
Abū Sufyān said: "By God it has none. But I had no other resolution."
The Messenger of God ordered the people to prepare for attacking Mecca. He prayed: "O God, hinder the spies and reports from reaching Quraysh, until we catch them off guard in their land."
But Ḥāṭib b. Abī Baltaʿah wrote a message of warning and sent it to Quraysh [letting them on the Muslims' plan]. The Prophet was informed about this through revelation. So he sent ʿAlī and al-Zubayr to intercept his letter and take it from the woman who was smuggling it.[1]
The Prophet left Abū Dharr al-Ghafārī in charge of Medina, and left the town for Mecca on the tenth of Ramadan in the eighth year [AH, 1 January 630 CE]. With him were ten thousand Muslims and about four hundred horsemen. He did not leave any of the Muhājirūn (Meccan Immigrants) or Anṣār (Medinan Supporters) in Medina.
Abū Sufyān b. al-Ḥārith b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib and ʿAbd-Allāh b. Umayyah b. al-Mughīrah crossed paths with the Messenger of God at Nīq al-ʿUqāb, between Mecca and Medina. They sought permission to see him, but he declined. Umm Salamah advocated on their behalf: "O Messenger of God, one of them is the son of your uncle, and the other is the son of your aunt and also your son-in-law."
"I have no need of them," said the Prophet. "The son of my uncle has slandered me. And the son of my aunt, who happens to be

1 We discussed this part of the story in Sūrah al-Mumtaḥanah [under verses 60:1-9]. (Auth.)

my son-in-law, said what he said to me in Mecca."
Abū Sufyān [the Prophet's cousin] had one of his sons with him. When this news reached them, he said: "By God, either he will allow me to meet with him, or I will take the hand of my son here, and we will go into the desert till we die out of hunger and thirst." When the Prophet heard this, he softened toward them, and allowed them to come in. So they came in and accepted Islam at his hand.
The Quraysh were completely oblivious of the Muslim army until they camped at Marr al-Ẓahrān [which is very close to Mecca]. That night, Abū Sufyān b. Ḥarb, Ḥakīm b. Ḥizām and Budayl b. Warqāʾ went out to scout. Meanwhile, ʿAbbās thought to himself: "Alas for the Quraysh! By God, if the Messenger of God surprises them in their land and enters Mecca by force, the Quraysh will be wiped off from history!" So mounted the mule of God's Messenger and said [to himself]: "I will go out to al-Arāk [next to ʿArafāt]; perhaps I will come across a woodsman, a milk-seller or a traveler entering Mecca. Ten I can tell them how close the Messenger of God is, so that they [the Meccans] can come to him and plead for immunity."
[What follows is narrated from the perspective of ʿAbbās.]
ʿAbbās said:
I was roaming in al-Arāk, looking for what I had gone for, when by God I heard the voices of Abū Sufyān, Ḥakīm b. Ḥizām and Budayl b. Warqāʾ. Abū Sufyān was saying: "By God, I have never seen a night lit by so much fire as tonight."
Budayl said: "These fires belong to Khuzāʿah tribe."
"Nay," said Abū Sufyān, "Khuzāʿah is much humbler than this."
Recognizing his voice, I said: "Abā Ḥanẓalah!"—meaning Abū Sufyān.
"Abū al-Faḍl?" he cried.
"Indeed."
He said: "At your service. May my father and mother be sacrificed for you! What is the news?"
"The Messenger of God is right behind you," I said. "He has come with a force you cannot stand against: ten thousand Muslims."
"What do you say I should do?"
"Mount on the back of this mule [behind me]. I will get immunity for you from the Messenger of God. For, by God, if he overcomes

you [as an enemy], he will strike your neck."
So I took him with me on the mule of God's Messenger, spurring it along. Whenever we passed the fire of the Muslims, they would say: "This is the uncle of God's Messenger, riding the mule of God's Messenger." When we came to the fire of ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, he said: "Abū Sufyān! Thank God for putting you in our grasp, unprotected by any treaty or covenant!" He then rushed to the Messenger of God. I also urged the mule on harder, until we confronted one another at the entrance of the tent. But ʿUmar overtook us like a slow animal would overtake a slow man.
He burst in [the Prophet's tent] and said: "Messenger of God! It's Abū Sufyān, your enemy! God has put him in our hands, unprotected by any treaty or covenant. Let me strike his neck!"
I jumped in: "Messenger of God! I have granted him protection."
Then I sat next to the Messenger of God, took his head in my hands and said [to myself]: "By God, no one shall whisper to him today other than me."
But ʿUmar went on and on, until I said: "Knock it off, ʿUmar! By God, what you're doing to this man is only because he is from Banū ʿAbd Manāf tribe. If he were from ʿAdī b. Kaʿb [ʿUmar's tribe], you wouldn't have spoken like this."
"You knock it off, ʿAbbās," said ʿUmar. "When you accepted Islam, it meant more to me than it would have if al-Khaṭṭāb had accepted Islam."
The Messenger of God said: "Go, for I have granted him security until you bring him to me the next morning."
Next morning I took Abū Sufyān to the Messenger of God. When he saw him, he said, "Dear Abā Sufyān! Is it not time for you to realize and acknowledge that there is no god but Allah?"
Abū Sufyān said: "May my father and my mother be your ransom! How out-reaching, compassionate, noble and forbearing you are! By God, if there were any other god, they would have availed me in the Battles of Badr and Uḥud."
The Prophet said: "Dear Abā Sufyān! Is it not time for you to realize and acknowledge that I'm God's messenger?"
"May my father and my mother be your ransom! As with this one, I find some hesitation about it in myself."
"Shame on you!" I told him. "Utter the testament of faith before

you lose your head."[1] Thus he proclaimed the testimonies of faith [and embraced Islam].

The Messenger of God told me: "Leave, O ʿAbbās, and hold him at the narrow passage of the valley so that the hosts of God would march before him."

So I made him stand on the base of the mountain, at the narrow edge of the valley. As the tribes marched before him he would ask, "Who are these?" And I would name the tribes for him: "This is Aslam tribe. This is Juhaynah. This is so-and-so." Until the Messenger of God came by with the Green Battalion (*katībat al-khaḍrāʾ*)[2] of the Muhājirūn (Meccan Immigrants) and the Anṣār (Medinan Supporters). They were completely clad in iron, such that only their eyes could be seen. "Who are they, Abā al-Faḍl?" I said: "This is the Messenger of God, surrounded by the Muhājirūn and the Anṣār." Abū Sufyān exclaimed: "O Abā al-Faḍl! The kingdom of your nephew has indeed grown very large!" I said: "Shame on you! This is prophethood [not kingdom]." He said: "Yes, in this case."

[What follows is told from a general perspective.]

Ḥakīm b. Ḥizām and Budayl b. Warqāʾ came to the Messenger of God, accepted Islam, and swore oaths of allegiance to him. After they swore their oaths, the Messenger of God sent them on his behalf to Quraysh to invite them to Islam. He announced: "Whoever takes refuge in Abū Sufyān's house"—which was at one end of Mecca—"shall be safe. And whoever enters Ḥakīm's house"—which was at the other end of Mecca—"shall be safe. And whoever goes into their own house, locks the door, and refrains [from fighting] shall also be safe."

After Abū Sufyān and Ḥakīm left the Messenger of God and

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1 As some scholars have pointed out, ʿAbbās is an overrated character in the histories, primarily because of the influence of the Abbasids, who wanted to portray their ancestor as a staunch supporter of the Prophet. Even when he sided with the Prophet, it was more out of tribal commitment than obedience to God's messenger. Much of the credit given to him, including the genuineness of his faith, should be taken with a grain of salt. (Ed.)

2 This is an expression for a well-equipped army. The dark color of the armors is likened to green. Arabs sometimes used green for black. Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 21:110. (Ed.)

headed toward Mecca, he sent al-Zubayr b. al-ʿAwwām in their wake. He ordered al-Zubayr to take some of the Muhājirūn's horsemen and plant their flag at the high point of Mecca, on Mount al-Ḥajūn. He told them: "Do not leave until I arrive." When the Messenger of God entered Mecca later, he erected his tent there [in al-Ḥajūn].

He sent Saʿd b. ʿUbadāh with a battalion of the Anṣār as his vanguards. He also dispatched al-Khālid b. al-Walīd with some of the Quḍāʿah and Banū Sulaym tribes who had accepted Islam, and ordered him to go to the lowest point of Mecca and plant his flag at a distance from the houses.

The Messenger of God commanded them all to keep their weapons sheathed, and only to fight those who attacked them. The only exceptions were four men and two women. The four men whom he ordered to be executed were: ʿAbd-Allāh b. Saʿd b. Abī Ṣarḥ, al-Ḥuwayrith b. Nufayl, Ibn Khaṭal, and Miqyas b. Ṣabābah. The two women were singers who used to sing slanderous poetry about him. He said about these six: "Execute them, even if you find them clinging to the drapes of the Kaʿbah."

ʿAlī killed al-Huwayrith b. Nufayl and one of the songstresses; the other one fled. Miqyas b. Ṣabābah was killed in the market. Ibn Khaṭal was found clinging to the drapes of the Kaʿbah, so Saʿīd b. Ḥurayth and ʿAmmār b. Yāsir competed to get him first; Saʿīd surpassed ʿAmmar and executed Ibn Khaṭal.

Abū Sufyān hastened back to the Messenger of God. He grasped his stirrup, kissed it, and entreated: "May my father and mother be sacrificed for you! Have you heard the war cry of Saʿd [b. ʿUbadāh]? He is chanting:

الْيَوْمُ يَوْمُ الْمَلْحَمَةِ　　الْيَوْمُ تُسْبَى الْحُرَمَةُ

The day of massacre is today;
The women's captivity is today.

The Messenger of God told ʿAlī: "Go after him, and take the flag from him. You be the one to enter [the city] with it, and do so in a gentle manner." So ʿAlī took the flag and entered [the city] as he was commanded to."

When the Messenger of God entered Mecca, the chieftains of Quraysh took refuge inside the Kaʿbah, thinking that the sword would never be lifted from them. The Messenger of God stood up by the door of the Kaʿbah and proclaimed: "There is no god but Allah, the one and the only. He fulfilled His promise, granted victory to His servant, and defeated all tribes alone. Lo! I hereby trample over any claim over an outstanding property, privilege or blood,[1] except for two positions: custodianship of the Kaʿbah, and providing water to the pilgrims; these two shall be returned to their rightful owners. Lo! Indeed Mecca is a sacred and forbidden city by God's decree. Its prohibition was not lifted for anyone before me. Nor was it for me, except for a short span of a day. And it shall remain sacred and forbidden until the arrival of the Hour. Its fresh herbs shall not be plucked; its trees shall not be cut; its wildlife shall not be frightened off. One cannot pick up what is left there, except for one who looks for its owner [without deriving any personal benefit from it]."[2]

Then the Prophet said: "Lo! You were indeed bad neighbors to your prophet! You rejected him, abandoned him, drove him into exile, and persecuted him. Then, as though that was not enough, you came after me to fight me in my land. But now you may go, for indeed you are freemen (*al-ṭulaqāʾ*)."

The people came out like dead being brought back to life from their graves. They entered Islam en masse. Since God placed their lives in the Prophet's hands without fighting, the people of Mecca were his rightful property (called *fayʾ*). That is why they became known as "freemen" (*al-ṭulaqāʾ*).

Ibn al-Zibaʿrī came to the Messenger of God, converted to Islam and sang [in impromptu verse]:

يَا رَسُولَ الْمَلِيكِ إِنَّ لِسَانِي رَاتِقٌ مَا فَتَقْتُ إِذْ أَنَا بُوْرٌ

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1 That is: "Let us start with a clean slate. All outstanding interest payments and unrevenged bloods are void. That is water under the bridge. Let bygones be bygones." (Ed.)

2 See Chapter 90's examination of narrations above, number 1; and the second suggested meaning narrated from *al-Kashshāf* under verse 90:2. (Ed.)

إِذْ أُبارِی الشَّیْطَانُ فِی سَنَنِ الْـــ ـغَیِّ وَ مَنْ مَالَ مَیْلُهُ مَثْبُورُ

آمَنَ اللَّحْمُ وَ الْعِظَامُ لِرَبِّی ثُمَّ قَلْبِی الشَّهِیدُ أَنْتَ النَّذِیرُ

O Messenger of the King! My tongue shall stitch
A veil that I tore when engrossed in decay:
A rival of Devil, heading for a ditch;
So lost are those who incline away.
I believe in my Lord without a hitch;
And my heart testifies you're the warner today.[1]

(5) Ibn Masʿūd said: When the Prophet conquered Mecca, he entered [the Sacred Mosque] while there were 360 idols around the Sacred House. He went around striking them with a stick and reciting: *The truth has come, and falsehood neither originates [anything] nor does it restore [any-thing]* (34:49); *The truth has come, and falsehood has vanished. Indeed falsehood is bound to vanish* (17:81).[2]

(6) Ibn ʿAbbās said: When the Messenger of God entered Mecca, he refused to enter the Sacred House while the idols were still in it. So he ordered them to be taken out, along with an icon of Abraham and Ishmael with raffling arrows (*al-azlām*)[3] in their hands. He said: "May God kill them [the idolaters]! By God, they knew that they [Abraham and Ishmael] never divided shares [and/or gambled] by these [arrows]."[4]

Author's comment: There are many narrations about the conquest of Mecca. Anyone who wishes to look into this more should examine compendiums of hadith and Prophetic biographies (sing. *sīrah*). What was offered above was rather a summary.

1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, part of the account of the conquest of Mecca.

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

3 See volume 9, pp. 227-229 of the English translation, under verse 5:3; and volume 11, p. 156, under verse 5:90. (Ed.)

4 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

Chapter 111

al-Masad (The Palm Fiber)

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Verses 1-5

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 5 verses. It is a severe warning to Abū Lahab and his wife for destroying themselves, ruining their deeds, and heading for hell.

تَبَّتْ يَدَا أَبِي لَهَبٍ وَتَبَّ ﴿١﴾

(111:1) *Perish* (tabbat, from tabb and tabāb) *the hands of Abū Lahab, and perish he* (tabba)*!*

There are a number of meanings offered for *tabb* and *tabāb*:

(1) "Loss and destruction," according to al-Jawharī.
(2) "Perpetual loss," according to al-Rāghib.
(3) "Failure."
(4) "Being devoid of any good."

All these meanings are very close. The hand is the limb by which one seeks one's goals, and to which the majority of one's acts are ascribed. The "*tabāb* (failure, destruction) of hands" is a way of saying that one's efforts and actions—which one typically does with one's hands—result in a loss. In other words, the deeds which one performs by one's hands are rendered void. Their deeds do not give the desired outcome, and the person does not find any benefit from them. The second *tabba* indicates a loss of oneself, where one loses one's soul due to being deprived from eternal happiness. That amounts to everlasting destruction.

Perish the hands of Abū Lahab, and perish he: Given the above, there are two possible interpretations for this verse: (1) It is an imprecation against Abū Lahab, saying: "May he be destroyed! May his attempts to put out the light of prophethood be in vain!" (2) It describes God's judgment

against him.[1]

The chapter is about Abū Lahab b. ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, who was the Prophet's uncle and a relentless enemy of his. He persistently denied the Prophet and did not hesitate to do anything within his ability to harass God's Messenger, both verbally and practically. He is the one who told the Prophet, "May you perish" (*tabban laka*) when the Prophet called his relatives to Islam the first time. Thus this chapter was revealed, where God returned his imprecation to him.

Here are some views concerning his name:

(1) Abū Lahab was his given name, even though it is in the form of a *kunyah* (title).
(2) His name was ʿAbd al-ʿUzzá.
(3) His name was ʿAbd Manāf.
(4) His real name was ʿAbd al-ʿUzzá (lit. servant of ʿUzzá), but that is not mentioned here because ʿUzzá was a pagan idol. God did not want to refer to someone as a servant of another god—even if that was their name—because everyone is a servant of Allah.
(5) The use of *kunyah* here—instead of his given name—is derogatory because Abū Lahab literally means "Father of flame."

Comment: The last view is the most plausible explanation. Abū Lahab suggests some connection with fire flames (sing. *lahab*). This is like some people being nicknamed "Abū al-Khayr" (Father of Good), "Abū al-Faḍl" (Father of Virtue) or "Abū al-Sharr" (Father of Evil) because they are associated with good, virtue or evil, respectively. Therefore, when we read below: *Soon he will enter a blazing fire* (111:3), it is like saying: "Perish the hands of this hellish man! And may the flames of hell adhere to him."

مَا أَغْنَىٰ عَنْهُ مَالُهُ وَمَا كَسَبَ ﴿٢﴾

(111:2) *His wealth availed him not* (mā aghnā)*, nor what he had earned* (mā kasaba).

The verse's meaning is: "Neither his wealth nor his deeds—or the consequences of his deeds—will protect him from the destruction of his soul and his hands." This is a destruction which is either decreed against him,

1 The meaning would be: "God has decreed that Abū Lahab's efforts would be ineffective, and himself would end up in wretchedness." (Ed.)

or imprecated against him.[1]

سَيَصْلَىٰ نَارًا ذَاتَ لَهَبٍ ﴿٣﴾

(111:3) ***Soon he will enter*** **(sa-yaṣlá)** ***a blazing fire,***

The verb *yaṣlá* means *yadkhulu* (he enters). *A blazing fire* is the eternal fire of hell. The indefinite form of *a blazing fire* emphasizes its immensity and horror.

وَامْرَأَتُهُ حَمَّالَةَ الْحَطَبِ ﴿٤﴾

(111:4) ***and his wife [too], the firewood carrier*** **(ḥammālat al-ḥaṭab),**

The conjunction "and" at the beginning of this verse connects *his wife* to the pronoun in the last verse: *Soon he will enter* (111:3). The meaning is: "His wife will also soon enter…"[2]

فِي جِيدِهَا حَبْلٌ مِنْ مَسَدٍ ﴿٥﴾

(111:5) ***with a rope of palm fiber*** **(masad)** ***around her neck.***

Masad is "a rope made of twisted fibers." His wife used to carry thorny branches and similar annoyances, and cast them on the path of the Prophet at night to harass him.

Apparently what is meant by these two verses [111:4-5] is that when she enters hellfire on the Day of Resurrection, she will be in the same form that

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1 The first particle *mā* is negative (*nāfiyah*, meaning not). The second *mā* can be either relative (*mawṣūlah*, meaning what) or serve to turn the verb that follows it into a verbal noun (called *maṣdariyyah*). In the first case, *ma kasaba* would mean "what he acquired through his deeds," which would be the results and consequences of his deeds. In the second case, *ma kasaba* would mean "his acquisition," which would be his very deeds. (Auth.)

2 The last part of the verse—*ḥammālata al-ḥaṭab* (the firewood carrier)—is an adjective for *his wife*. Therefore, the word *ḥammālah* (carrier) should have been *marfūᶜ* in terms of inflection (*ḥammālatu*), in compliance with the noun which it describes. However, it is *manṣūb* (in the accusative form), making it the object of an omitted verb that indicates rebuke. The implied meaning is: "I condemn the firewood carrier." Some exegetes have suggested that *the firewood carrier* is a *ḥāl* (circumstantial qualifier, participial phrase, adverb) for *his wife*. This is a subtle and elegant meaning, which we will interpret under the next verse. This would make the next verse a second *ḥāl* for *his wife*. (Auth.)

she used to be in this world. She will be punished in hell *while* she carries firewood, with a rope of palm fiber around her neck.

Majmaʿ al-bayān says:

> Question: Was it still incumbent on Abū Lahab to believe after the revelation of this sūrah? And *could* he believe? If he believed, would he not be proving God's revelation wrong, for He says: *Soon he will enter a blazing fire* (111:3)?
>
> Response: It was still obligatory for him to believe, because that is irrevocable. However, the threats in this chapter are conditional on his refraining to believe.

This question is based on a flawed premise. It misses the fact that God's irrevocable decree applies to *voluntary* human actions. Therefore, the divine decree does not negate or nullify free will, nor coerce one to do a certain act out of compulsion. When God wills a *voluntary agent* to do something, He wills the person to do so *by their volition*. If they perform the act by being transformed into an involuntary being, then God's will is not fulfilled [because His will was for the act to be done by a voluntary agent]. That is an impossibility. And if the act which is firmly decreed by God is to be done by choice, then the person also has the choice not to do it, even though in reality they perform the act. The reader should reflect on this. We have already discussed this in several places.

Therefore, we can say that Abū Lahab could have believed and saved himself from the fire, but he chose not to do so. It was irrevocably decreed for him to enter hell *due to his voluntary denial*.

The same idea can be seen in other verses which forecast the denial of the disbelievers among the Quraysh, such as: *As for the faithless, it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them, they will not have faith* (2:6); *The word has certainly become due against most of them, so they will not have faith* (36:7). The same applies to verses which discuss the sealing of hearts.[1]

1 See verses 80:20 and 81:29, and number 3 under Chapter 91's examination of narrations, above. Also see volume 1, pp. 143 and 162ff of the English translation, under verses 2:21-25 and 2:26-27; volume 2, pp. 209ff and 271-272, under verses 2:153-157 and 2:164; volume 13, pp. 25ff and 81ff, under verses 6:9 and 6:35; volume 15, p. 65, under verses 7:10-25; volume 39, p. 160, under verse 74:56; p. 200, under verse 76:3; pp. 233-234 under verse 76:30. (Ed.)

Examining Narrations

(1) Concerning *and warn the nearest of your kin* (26:214) Ibn ʿAbbās said: When this verse was revealed, the Prophet climbed Mount al-Ṣafā and said: "Urgent news!"
The Quraysh gathered around him and said: "What is it?"
"If I were to tell you that an enemy is about to attack you the next morning or evening, would you believe me?"
"Of course we would."
"In that case," he said, "I'm here to warn you of an intense imminent torment."
"May you perish!" Abū Lahab retorted. "Is this why you gathered us all around?"
Thus God revealed: *Perish the hands of Abū Lahab…* (111:1-5).[1]

(2) Ṭāriq al-Muḥāribī said: I was in Dhū al-Majāz market, when I came across a young man saying: "O people! Say, 'There is no god but God' (*lā ilāh illā Allāh*), and you shall be delivered." I saw another man following him and pelting him [with rocks]. The young man's calves and heels were bleeding because of that. The older man was crying: "Hey everyone! This man is a liar! Don't believe what he says."
"Who is this?" I inquired.
They said: "This [younger man] is Muḥammad, who believes to be a prophet. And this [older man] is his uncle Abū Lahab, who believes that he is a liar."[2]

(3) Imam al-Kāẓim said: One of the Prophet's miracles was when Umm Jamīl, the wife of Abū Lahab, came to him after Chapter 111 was revealed. Abū Bakr b. Abī Quḥāfah, who was with the Prophet, said: "O Messenger of God, here comes Umm Jamīl, looking for you enraged. She is carrying a rock that she is planning to throw at you."
"She cannot see me," the Prophet assured him.
She came forward and asked Abū Bakr, "Where's your buddy?"

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1 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*. This is also narrated in the *tafsīr* of the current chapter, on the authority of Saʿīd b. Jubayr, on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās, without associating the call with the revelation of the verse: *and warn the nearest of your kin* (26:214).

2 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

"Wherever God wills him to be."
"I'm looking for him. If I see him, I shall definitely stone him for he has vilified me. By al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzá, I'm a poetess [and can easily retaliate]."
Then [when she left] Abū Bakr asked: "O Messenger of God, didn't she see you?"
"No. God cast a veil between me and her."[1]

Author's comment: Similar accounts to this are also reported through several Sunni chains of transmission.

(4) Concerning *and his wife [too], the firewood carrier* (111:4) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: She was Umm Jamīl, the daughter of Ṣakhr.[2] She used to gossip about the Messenger of God and transmit his news to the disbelievers.[3]

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1 *Qurb al-Isnād*, via its chain of narration, part of a longer hadith.

2 This is a mistake. Umm Jamīl was the sister of Ṣakhr (Abū Sufyān) and the daughter of Ḥarb. (Ed.).

3 This means that *firewood carrier* is a metaphor for one who kindles the fire of conflict and animosity among others through gossip. This is a common metaphor in Middle Eastern literature. (Ed.)

Chapter 112

al-Ikhlāṣ (Sincerity)

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Verses 1-4

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 4 verses. It describes God through the following qualities: (1) He has an absolutely one essence. (2) Everything other than Him resort to Him for their existential needs. (3) Nothing ever shares at all in His essence, attributes or acts. This is the Qur'anic monotheism, which is an exclusive feature of the Holy Qur'an, and upon which is built all Islamic teachings.

There are many narrations about the merits of this sūrah, to the point that both Sunnis and Shias relate that it is equal to a third of the Qur'an. We will present them below, God-willing.

The chapter could have been revealed in either Mecca or Medina. However, some accounts about its context of revelation suggest that it was revealed in Mecca.

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ ﴿١﴾

(112:1) *Say: Behold* (huwa), *Allah is the Unique* (aḥad)

The pronoun *huwa* (lit. he, it) is a reference to the present situation or story (called *ḍamīr al-shaʾn* or *ḍamīr al-qiṣṣah*). It serves to highlight the importance of the sentence that comes after it.[1] As with the word *Allah*, it is a proper noun for God in Arabic, just as the divine has its own names in other languages. We had some discussion on this in our exposition of

1 This kind of pronoun neither has an antecedent, nor is the subject of a sentence. The verse would be a complete sentence without it. It can be translated as "this"—used to draw the audience's attention to a subject. For instance, one may point to the Qur'an and say: "This! The Qur'an is your solution." That is why it can also be translated as "behold, lo, look." (Ed.)

Sūrah al-Fātiḥah.[1]

Aḥad (the one, the only) is an adjective derived from *waḥdah* (unity, oneness), like *wāḥid* (one, unit). However, *aḥad* can only be applied to something that is not subject to any plurality whatsoever, whether externally or mentally. For that reason, it is not used for counting, unlike *wāḥid*. For every *wāḥid* of something, there is a second and a third which either exist presently in the external reality, or can be perceived in the mind and imagined to exist. Therefore, the *wāḥid* can potentially become many. Meanwhile, if one were to suppose a second for something that is described as *aḥad*, then that second would reduce to the very first item, without adding anything to it.

This can be seen in how two words are commonly used in Arabic. When one says, "No one (*aḥad*) came here," it negates the coming of not only one person, but also two and more. But when one says, "Not one (*wāḥid*) came here," it only negates the coming of one person specifically, without ruling out the possibility that two or more individuals may have come. Because *aḥad* has this meaning, it is only used in negations. The only case where it conveys an affirmative sense is with reference to the Almighty God. This is reflected elegantly in a sermon by Imam ʿAlī describing the absolute oneness of God (*tawḥīd*): "Anything that is described by oneness (*waḥdah*) is little, except Him." We presented some of the Imam's words about *tawḥīd* in our discussion on this subject in Sūrah al-Māʾidah.[2]

اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ ﴿٢﴾

(112:2) *Allah is the Ultimate Recourse* (al-ṣamad)

The root meaning of *ṣamad* is "seeking" or "seeking and relying upon."[3] Exegetes have offered several interpretations for this adjective, but most of them boil down to "a chief or master who is sought and resorted to." That is, one to whom people refer for their needs. Since it is mentioned in an unqualified form in this verse, it means "One Who is sought out for all needs."

If God is the One Who gives existence to all other beings, it follows that

1 See volume 1, pp. 44-45 of the English translation, under verse 1:1. (Ed.)

2 See volume 11, pp. 110ff of the English translation, under verses 5:68-86. (Ed.)

3 It is used as *ṣamadahu yasmuduhu ṣamadan*, meaning "he sought it" or "he sought it and relied upon it." (Auth.)

any being which can be called a "thing" (*shayʾ*)—other than Him—would entirely depend on Him: not only for its original essence and existence, but also for all its properties and traits. He says: *Look! All creation and command belong to Him* (7:54). He also says: *And the end of it all is your Lord* (53:42), where the word *al-muntahá* (the end, the terminus, the goal) is stated in an unqualified form. This means that He is the ultimate end that is sought (*al-ṣamad*) in every need and desire. Whatever is sought, the search ultimately ends in Him. It is He Who brings every search to fruition and fulfills every need.

This should clarify why the word *ṣamad* is preceded by the definite article *al-* (the): the article signifies that God alone is the absolute object that is sought out. There is no such article before *aḥad* in the first verse because the meaning of *aḥad* (unique, one and only) is only applicable to God. The word cannot be used to describe anything else as an affirmative attribute. That is why it does not need the article *al-* to signify exclusivity (*ḥaṣr*) or reference to a known subject (*ʿahd*).

Instead of repeating the word *Allah*, the verse could have used a pronoun: "He is the Ultimate Recourse"; or the two verses could have been merged: "Allah is the Unique and the Ultimate Recourse." However, the subject [Allah] is repeated to show that each sentence alone suffices to describe and introduce God. This is in line with the theme and purpose of the chapter, which is "defining"[1] God with descriptions that are specific to Him. Hence the desired knowledge of God can be achieved by either of these two independent statements: *Allah is the Unique* (112:1) and *Allah is the Ultimate Recourse* (112:2).

The two verses together describe God through His *essence* and His *acts*, respectively. The first verse—*Allah is the Unique* (112:1)—describes God's uniqueness, which is the core of His essence. The second verse—*Allah is the Ultimate Recourse* (112:2)—describes him as the Source at which everything ends and to which all return. That would be a description of His acts.

Some have interpreted *ṣamad* as *muṣmat*, which means "full, filled, solid, not hollow." This meaning refers to how God does not eat, does not drink, does not sleep, is not born, and does not give birth. Therefore, the next verse—*He begets not, nor is He begotten* (112:3)—would be an

1 The word "define" is not used in its literal and accurate sense, which is to set the boundaries and limits of something. It is used loosely in its more conventional and everyday sense. (Ed.)

interpretation of *ṣamad* (112:2).

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَ لَمْ يُولَدْ ﴿٣﴾ وَ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُواً أَحَدٌ ﴿٤﴾

(112:3-4) ***He begets not, nor is He begotten. Nor has He any equal.***

These two noble verses negate a few things about God: (1) Giving birth to anything, which means something of His own kind splitting off from Him. This would include any sense or manner of splitting and derivation, such as what the Christians hold about the Messiah—that he is the son of God—and what the idolaters hold about some of their gods—that they are God's children. (2) Having been born from another being and derived from it. This would also include any sense or manner of splitting and derivation, such as what the idolaters hold about their gods, where some of them sire or give birth to others, while some are the children of other gods. (3) Having any peer or counterpart that parallels Him in His essence or acts[1]—namely, giving existence to the beings (*ījād*), and directing their affairs (*tadbīr*). No one in the world—including the followers of any religion and others—has ever claimed that there is an equal for God in His *essence*, in the sense that there are multiple Necessary Beings. However, they consider Him to have counterparts on the plane of *actions*, which is managing the affairs of the universe. Some human deities, like the Pharaoh and Nimrod, made claims to being gods and worthy of worship. Their criterion for setting someone equal to God was having independent authority in managing what has been delegated to them. They viewed God as being an independent authority who manages the other lower authorities. Hence, they are the lords and gods, while He is the Lord of lords and the God of gods.

This sense of equality and parallelism to God can also be ascribed to a contingent being that is held to have some independence in its actions. That would also amount to being sufficient of God [in a certain domain]. However, all contingent beings are in need of Him. Thus, this verse also negates this sense of equality.[2]

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1 We did not mention attributes because God's attributes are either attributes of essence or attributes of action. The former are identical with the divine essence, and the latter are derived from the divine acts. (Auth.)

2 In other words, considering any act, force or being in the world to be independent of God in its effect would be contrary to the verse, *Nor has He*

It is possible to derive these three negations from God's uniqueness (*aḥadiyyah*, 112:1). However, the mind jumps quicker to the view that they derive from His quality of being the absolute and final recourse (*ṣamadiyyah*, 112:2). The derivation of these three negations from God's attribute of *ṣamad* can be elaborated as follows:

(1) *He begets not* (112:3). (a) Begetting is a type of division and partition, in one way or another, no matter how it is interpreted. (b) Division implies composition of parts. (c) A compound necessarily depends on its parts [for its completion and wholeness]. (d) *Allah is the Ultimate Recourse* (112:2), Whom is depended upon and sought out by any being which has a need, while Himself is free from all need. (e) Hence: *He begets not* (112:3).

(2) *Nor is He begotten* (112:3). (a) Being born from something means that the child depends on the parent for its existence (b) *Allah is the Ultimate Recourse* (112:2), Who is free from all need. (c) Hence: *Nor is He begotten* (112:3).

(3) *Nor has He any equal* (112:4). (a) A being would not be an equal or counterpart (*kufʾ*) to another being—whether in essence or actions—unless it is independent and needless of it in the domain of its equality. (b) *Allah is the Ultimate Recourse* (112:2), upon Whom all other beings depend in every imaginable way. (c) Hence: *Nor has He any equal* (112:4).

Therefore, it should be clear that the negations in these two verses [114:3-4] derive from God's attribute of *ṣamad* (the Absolute, the Ultimate Recourse; 112:2). If we add up these descriptions—that is, *ṣamad* and its implications—they amount to God's absolute oneness in His essence, attributes and acts. The conclusion is that God is One, and there is nothing that would compare or compete with Him. The divine essence exists for itself and by itself, without relying on anything else or needing any other being. The same can be said about His attributes and actions. Meanwhile, the essence, attributes and actions of things other than Him emanate from Him, in a way that is suitable for His majesty and grandeur. In sum, this chapter describes God as being *the one and only*.

Some have interpreted *equal* (112:4) as a spouse, because one's spouse is one's equal and counterpart (*kufʾ*). Therefore, the verse can be compared to: *And exalted be the glory of our Lord, He has taken neither any spouse*

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any equal (112:4). (Ed.)

(72:3). The problem with this view should be clear.[1]

Examining Narrations

(1) The Jews asked the Messenger of God, "Tell us the *nisbah* (lineage, identity) of your Lord." The Prophet waited for three days and did not respond to them. Then God revealed, *Say: Behold, Allah is the Unique…* (112:1-4).[2]

Author's comment: Narrations differ as to who the questioner was: (1) ʿAbd-Allāh b. Ṣūriyā, the Jew.[3] (2) ʿAbd-Allāh b. Salām, who asked this in Mecca, whereby he converted to Islam but hid his belief. (3) Some Jews. (4) The polytheists in Mecca.[4] In any case, God's *nisbah* means a description of His qualities and properties.[5]

(2) Imam ʿAlī said: God's *nisbah* (identity, family tree, description) is: *Say: Behold, Allah is the Unique…* (112:1-4).[6]

(3) During the Prophet's ascension (*miʿrāj*), God told him: Recite, *Say: Behold, Allah is the Unique…* (112:1-4) as I have revealed, for this is indeed My genealogy (*nisbah*) and description.[7]

(4) The Prophet said: Chapter 112 is one third of the Qur'an.[8]

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1 The problem with this interpretation is that it involves an unwarranted imposition of meaning on the verse. The verse negates any kind of equal or counterpart whatsoever, which is not limited to a spouse. (Ed.)

2 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Muslim, from Imam al-Ṣādiq.

3 *Al-Iḥtijāj*, from Imam al-ʿAskarī.

4 The last three views are found in a number of Sunni narrations. (Auth.)

5 *Nasab* and *nisbah* refer to one's lineage, which was a typical way of describing people at that time. (Trans.)

6 *Maʿānī al-akhbār*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Asbagh b. Nubātah, part of a longer hadith.

7 *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*, via its chain of narration, from Imam al-Ṣādiq. It has also narrated the same idea from Imam al-Kāẓim, via its chain of narration.

8 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Abū ʿUbayd's *al-Faḍāʾil*, on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās. There are numerous narrations from the Prophet through Sunni chains of transmission which express the same idea, on the authority of a number of Companions, including Ibn ʿAbbās, Abū al-Dardāʾ, Ibn ʿUmar, Jābir, Ibn Masʿūd, Abū al-Saʿīd al-Khudrī, Muʿādh b. Anas, Abū Ayyūb, Abū Umāmah and others. It is also related in a number of narrations

Author's comment: There are different views on what it means for this sūrah to be a third of the Qur'an, but the most fitting view is that Qur'anic teachings unravel into three principles: (1) monotheism; (2) prophethood; (3) afterlife. This sūrah covers one of the three, which is monotheism.

(5) Imam ʿAlī said: "I dreamt of al-Khiḍr the night before the battle of Badr, and told him, 'Teach me something by which I may defeat the enemy.' He suggested, 'Say: O He! O Who there is no he but Him (*yā huwa, yā man lā huwa illa huwa*).' Next morning I related this to the Messenger of God, who commented, 'O ʿAlī! You have been taught the Greatest Name (*al-ism al-aʿẓam*).' So that was on my tongue during the day of Badr." After reciting Chapter 112, Imam ʿAlī would say: "O He, O Who there is no he but Him, forgive me and help me against the disbelievers."[1]

(6) Imam ʿAlī said: He is One (*al-aḥad*), but not in a numerical sense.[2]

(7) Once Imam al-Jawād was asked: "What does *ṣamad* (112:2) mean?" He said: "A chief and master to whom people resort for anything minor or major."[3]

Author's comment: There are other interpretations of *ṣamad* related from the Imams:

(8) Imam al-Bāqir said: *Ṣamad* is a superior, above whom there is no other commander or authority.[4]

(9) Imam al-Ḥusayn said: *Ṣamad* is that which is not hollow. *Ṣamad* is that which does not sleep. *Ṣamad* is that which has always been and shall always be.[5]

(10) Imam al-Sajjād said: *Ṣamad* is the One Who, when He wills anything, He say to it "Be," and it is [36:82], *Ṣamad* is the One Who originated all things and created them as opposites with different forms and types, while maintaining oneness and singularity

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from the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt.

1 *Al-Tawḥīd*.

2 *Nahj al-balāghah*. This is also narrated from Imam al-Riḍā in *al-Tawḥīd*, except that it says *aḥad* instead of *al-aḥad*.

3 *Al-Kāfī*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Dāwūd b. al-Qāsim al-Jaʿfarī.

4 *Maʿānī al-akhbār*.

5 *Maʿānī al-akhbār*.

exclusively to Himself, free from all opposite, form, likeness and peer.[1]

Author's comment: The central meaning of *ṣamad* is what we have related from Imam al-Jawād [number 7] because it is based on the etymological root of the word, which signifies "seeking." The other interpretations narrated from the Imams are the *implications* of this original and root meaning. They are derived from the fact that God is the ultimate point of reference for all things in all needs. Hence, He is the final end, Who is Himself free from all needs.

(11) The people of Basra wrote to Imam al-Ḥusayn b. ᶜAlī asking him about the meaning of *ṣamad* (112:2). He wrote back to them: In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful. Do not delve recklessly into the Qur'an. Do not argue over it. Do not say anything about it without knowledge. For indeed I heard my grandfather, the Messenger of God, say: "Whoever speaks about the Qur'an without knowledge shall take their seat in the fire." God has Himself interpreted *ṣamad*. He says: *Allah is the Unique. Allah is the Ultimate Recourse* (112:1-2), then He interprets that by saying: *He begets not, nor was He begotten. Nor has He any equal* (112:3-4).[2]

(12) Imam al-Kāẓim said: Know that God, is One (*wāḥid*), Unique (*aḥad*) and Absolute (*ṣamad*). He begets not, such that He might be inherited. Nor is He begotten, such that He might have a partner.[3]

(13) Imam ᶜAlī said in a sermon: [He is] One Who is not begotten so that He would be a partaker in might. Nor does He beget so that He might be inherited and subject to death.[4]

(14) Imam ᶜAlī said in a sermon: He is far exalted of having any equal to whom He may be compared.[5]

Author's comment: There are further narrations which convey the

1 *Maᶜānī al-akhbār*.

2 *Al-Tawḥīd*, on the authority of Wahab b. Wahab al-Qurashī, from Imam al-Ṣādiq, from his fathers.

3 *Al-Tawḥīd*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ibn Abī ᶜUmayr.

4 *Al-Tawḥīd*.

5 *Al-Tawḥīd*.

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aforementioned meanings.[1]

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1 Controversies and disagreements over religious statements are significantly a result of not having a clear notion of God. Before stating anything related to religion—whether descriptive, in the form of *is*, or prescriptive, in the form of *ought to be*—one must first define what they mean by God. When the subject is vague and unknown, how can one predicate anything on it? There is often a primitive image of God as an anthropomorphic artisan who is subject to the passage of time like us. This chapter, the author's exposition of it, and the narrations above, provide us with a clear, consistent and profound view of God which can be a solid basis for developing coherent religious beliefs and practices. The problem with thinking of God primarily as "the Creator" is that it lends itself to an anthropomorphic, temporal and dualistic notion of the divine principle. The same can be said about viewing God as the King, or even as the Beloved. Instead, this chapter describes God as the one and only true being, the absolute, the infinite, the colorless, the all-present, the matchless, the underlying ground of existence. An indispensable prerequisite for having any glimpse of the divine is realizing *timelessness*. Though this is a rare experience, it can be achieved through the cessation of *preferring* any manifestation of being over another, which is the only sin ultimately. That is the practice of *equanimity*. The idea that God is not bound by temporality can be deduced from verse 112:3. (Ed.)

Chapter 113

al-Falaq (The Daybreak)

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Verses 1-5

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

This sūrah was revealed in Medina and consists of 6 verses. It commands the Prophet to seek refuge in God from all harms, some of which are specified. It can be deduced from some narrations about the context of its revelation that the chapter was revealed in Medina.

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ الْفَلَقِ ﴿١﴾

(113:1) *Say: I seek refuge* (aʿūdhu, from ʿawdh) *with the Lord of the daybreak* (falaq)

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ʿAwdh means "guarding oneself and avoiding a harm by resorting to someone who can repel it." *Falq* means "splitting, dividing."[1] *Falaq* is commonly used to mean "dawn," because dawn cleaves apart the darkness [as in the expression "the crack of dawn"]. Therefore, the meaning is: "I seek refuge with the lord of the dawn Who splits the darkness asunder." This expression is appropriate for seeking refuge from types of harm which *cover* what is good and *conceal* it from others.

Two other suggested interpretations for *falaq* are:

(1) Anything that is created and brought into existence. This is based on a metaphorical image for the act of creation, where the void of non-existence is cleft apart and an object is brought into the world of existence from it. Hence, *al-falaq* would be equivalent

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1 *Falaq* is a *ṣifah mushabbahah* which implies the meaning of *mafʿūl* (passive participial noun, accusative case), just as *qaṣaṣ* means *maqṣūṣ* (story, that which is told). (Auth.)
In this case, *falaq*, it is a noun which denotes the object of God's act of splitting. See the footnote under verse 81:24, above. (Ed.)

to *al-makhlūq* (the created, the creation).

(2) A well in hell, as mentioned in some narrations.

مِن شَرِّ مَا خَلَقَ ﴿٢﴾

(113:2) *from the harm of what He has created,*

That is, from the harm of anything which *can be* harmful. It is about any potential harm from humans, jinn, animals and other created beings. In other words, even though *what He has created* is stated in an unqualified form, it does not imply that everything which God has created is harmful.

وَمِن شَرِّ غَاسِقٍ إِذَا وَقَبَ ﴿٣﴾

(113:3) *and from the harm of the darkness* (ghāsiq) *when it falls* (waqaba, from wuqūb):

Siḥāḥ al-lughah says:

> *Ghasaq* is "the first darkness of night." The verb *ghasaqa yaghasiqu* is used when the night falls and it becomes dark. *Ghāsiq* means "the night, after the disappearance of the twilight."

Wuqūb means "entering." The meaning is: "and from the harm of night when it arrives with its darkness." The verse ascribes harm to the night because: (1) the darkness of the night aids the malevolent in their plots by providing them cover; (2) one is more vulnerable to the assault of evil at night than in the day. That is why more crimes are committed during the night than the day. Some have interpreted *ghāsiq* as anyone or anything harmful which may attack a person in any way or time whatsoever.

Stating *the harm of the darkness* after *the harm of what He has created* (113:2) is a case of stating the specific after the general, which shows emphasis and importance. This sūrah emphasizes three specific types of harm: the harm of the nightfall [113:3], the harm of the magicians' tricks [113:4], and the harm of the enviers' jealousy [113:5]. A common denominator of all of them is that people are often unaware and heedless of their occurrence.

وَمِن شَرِّ النَّفَّاثَاتِ فِي الْعُقَدِ ﴿٤﴾

(113:4) *and from the harm of the witches who blow on knots* (al-nafāthāti fi al-ʿuqad),

This verse is about sorceresses who bind their spells on the bewitched

through tying knots and blowing on them. Women are specifically mentioned because they used to practice sorcery more than men. The verse confirms that sorcery has *some* impact. The same can be deduced from the story of Hārūt and Mārūt: *But they would learn from those two that with which they would cause a split between man and his wife – though they could not harm anyone with it except with Allah's leave* (2:102), as well as the story of Pharaoh's magicians.

Another suggested interpretation is women who persuade and pressure their husbands to influence their opinion and incline them toward their own desire. Accordingly, "knot" (ʿ*aqd*) would mean "opinion, view"; and "blowing on a knot" would be a metaphor for weakening the other side's opinion. However, this interpretation is far from what springs to the mind from the text.

وَمِن شَرِّ حَاسِدٍ إِذَا حَسَدَ ۝٥

(113:5) ***and from the harm of the envier when he envies.***

The last part of the verse clarifies that it is about *acting upon* one's envy and carrying it out in practice [not merely harboring envy and grudge in one's heart].[1] Some say that the verse also includes the evil eye, because the evil eye is a form of jealousy that materializes in the soul when a person sees something that they find impressive and desirable.

Examining Narrations

(1) A Jewish man cast a spell on the Prophet, which made him ill. Then Gabriel came to him and revealed Chapters 113 and 114 (called *al-miʿawwidhatān*:[2] the two means for seeking refuge). He said: "A Jewish man has cast a spell on you, and the [knot used for the] spell is in such-and-such a well."
The Prophet sent ʿAlī to bring the knot from the well. He ordered ʿAlī to untie the knots while reciting a verse [for each knot that he

1 In other words, *when he envies* is not a repetition of *the envier*, but a qualification of it. *The envier* is one who is given to comparing themselves with others. Such a person becomes harmful only *when he envies*; that is, when they give outward expression to jealousy and contempt in their heart. (Ed.)

2 The correct recording of this word is *miʿawwidhatān* or *muʿawwidhatayn*—as a subject, meaning two things which give refuge. The common form of *miʿawwadhatān* or *muʿawwadhatayn*—as an object—is a mistake. (Ed.)

untied]. So ʿAlī began untying while reciting [these two chapters], until the Prophet could get up, as if freed from a bond.[1]

Author's comment: The same idea is found in many Sunni narrations, with slight differences. Several accounts say that the Prophet also sent Zubayr and ʿAmmār along with ʿAlī. There are also further Shia narrations on this.

Some have objected to the content of these narrations by arguing that the Prophet was protected from magic, as God says: *And the wrongdoers said, "You are just following a bewitched man." Look what analogies they have drawn for you; thus they have gone astray, and cannot find the way* (25:8-9).

Response: What is meant by *bewitched* (25:8) is being possessed by demons, which means a kind of magic that renders one insane.[2] However, there is no evidence that the Prophet was also immune from being harmed by magic in terms of physical health and so on.

(2) The Prophet often placed al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn under the protective charm[3] of these two sūrahs.[4]

(3) The Messenger of God said: Some verses have been revealed to me, the like of which have never been revealed: they are *al-miʿawwidhatān* (Chapters 113 and 114).[5]

Author's comment: Perhaps, what is meant by not having any like is that these two sūrahs are the only chapters which are exclusively for seeking protection; there is no other sūrah with this sole function.

(4) Ibn Masʿūd used to scratch out these two sūrahs [113 and 114] from

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, on the authority of Zayd b. Aslam. A similar account is narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq in *Ṭibb al-aʾimmah*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Muḥammad b. Sinān, on the authority of al-Mufaḍḍal.

2 This is what the polytheists claimed, and what the verses refute. (Ed.)

3 This is a special ritual called *taʿwīḍ*, where the special spiritual power of a formula is invoked by reciting it over a person or writing and attaching it to them. (Ed.)

4 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*.

5 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, on the authority of ʿUqbat b. ʿĀmir. The book adds: "Muslim has reported this in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*." *Al-Durr al-manthūr* has quoted this from al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasaʾī and also others. It has also quoted a similar idea from al-Ṭabarānī's *al-Awsaṭ*, on the authority of Ibn Masʿūd.

the manuscript of the Qur'an, saying: "Do not mix the Qur'an with things that are not part of it. These two are not part of the Book of God. Rather, they were given to the Prophet to seek refuge through them." Ibn Masʿūd did not used to recite them [in the prayer].[1]

Author's comment: After reporting the above, al-Suyūṭī quotes al-Bazzār:

None of the Companions agreed with Ibn Masʿūd. It has been established that the Prophet read these two sūrahs in his prayers, and we have verified that indeed they are part of the Qur'anic manuscript.

(5) Once Imam al-Bāqir was told: "Ibn Masʿūd used to erase these two sūrahs from Qur'anic manuscripts." The Imam replied: "My father used to say: Ibn Masʿūd did that in accordance with his own opinion. Otherwise,[2] they are part of the Qur'an."[3]

Author's comment: There are many narrations, through both Sunni and Shia chains of transmission, which express the same idea. Moreover, there is *tawātur* (consensus, mass-transmission that leaves no room for doubt) among all Muslims, agreeing that these two chapters are part of the Qur'an. Some critiques of the miracle of Qur'an argue that if the Qur'an were indeed a miracle of eloquence, then someone like Ibn Masʿūd would not have disagreed over the inclusion of these two sūrahs in the Qur'an. To this objection, several answers have been given, including: (1) We have absolute *tawātur* here, which is more than sufficient [to override and discard Ibn Masʿūd's personal opinion]. (2) There are no narrations from Ibn Masʿūd claiming that these two sūrahs were not sent to the prophet, or that they are not miracle of eloquence. He only argued that they are not part of the Qur'an—a claim which can be safely set aside by *tawātur*.

(6) The Prophet said: Falaq is a covered well in hell.[4]

(7) The Prophet said: Falaq is a gate of hell. When it is opened, it

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Aḥmad, al-Bazzār, al-Ṭabarānī and Ibn Mardawayh, via an authenticated chains of narration, on the authority of from Ibn ʿAbbās and Ibn Masʿūd.

2 Apparently the second sentence is Imam al-Bāqir's own words. (Ed.)

3 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū Bakr al-Ḥaḍramī.

4 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Jarīr, on the authority of Abū Hurayrah. There are several narrations that convey the same idea.

stokes hell.[1]

(8) The Prophet said: Falaq is a well in hell. When the hellfire flames up, it does so from Falaq.[2]

Author's comment: There are further narrations along the same lines.

(9) Al-Suddī said: Falaq is a well in hell. The inmates of hell seek refuge from its intense heat.[3]

(10) The Messenger of God said: Poverty verges on disbelief, and envy almost overpowers destiny (*qadar*).[4]

(11) The Prophet said: Envy nearly outstrips destiny.[5]

(12) The Messenger of God said: Indeed envy consumes good deeds the way fire consumes firewood.[6]

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1 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of ʿUqbat b. ʿĀmir.

2 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of ʿAmr b. ʿAbasah [or ʿAbsah].

3 *Majmaʿ al-bayān*. The book adds: "Abū Ḥamzah al-Thumālī and ʿAlī b. Ibrahīm [al-Qummī] in their books of *tafsīr*."

4 *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of his father, on the authority of al-Nawfalī, on the authority of al-Sakunī, from Imam al-Ṣādiq. This is also narrated, verbatim, from the Prophet, on the authority of Anas.

5 *Al-ʿUyūn*, via its chain of narration, on the authority of al-Malalṭī, from Imam Riḍā, from his father, from his forefathers.

6 *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Shaybah, on the authority of Anas.

Chapter 114

al-Nās (The People)

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Verses 1-6

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful

This sūrah was revealed in Medina and consists of 6 verses. It commands the Prophet to seek the protection of God from the evil of the slinking whisperer. Like the previous sūrah, it was revealed in Medina based on the narrations on the context of its revelation. In fact, the narrations indicate that the two chapters were revealed together.

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ ۝١ مَلِكِ النَّاسِ ۝٢ إِلَٰهِ النَّاسِ ۝٣

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(114:1-3) ***Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of humankind, the King of humankind, the God of humankind,***

When one feels insecure, weak and threatened in face of a danger, it is a human instinct to seek refuge in a source that has the power to protect the person and prevent the occurrence of the threat. There are three possible sources of refuge and protection for a person:

(1) The person's lord (*rabb*), meaning one who is in charge of the person's affairs, who manages their life, who nurtures them, and to whom they resort for all their needs. One of these needs is deflecting what threatens the person's survival. This source of refuge would be a sufficient cause who can grant protection to the person independently.

(2) An influential authority with prevailing power and rule, who can protect one who seeks protection, and use his authority to defend the person against evil, much like a king. This is also a sufficient cause who can effect change independently.

(3) The god that one worships. An implication of being an *ilāh* (god, deity, object of worship), especially a sole deity that has no partner, is the exclusive dedication of his worshipers to him. Hence,

they would not call upon any other god, and would not resort to any other source for their needs. Likewise, they would want only what their god wills, and would do only what he decrees.

God—the Glorious—is at once the lord of humanity, the king of humanity, and the god of humanity. He encompasses these three aspects alone, as He says: *That is Allah, your Lord! To Him belongs all kingdom. There is no god except Him. Then where are you being led away?* (39:6). He refers to his lordship [114:1] and godhood [114:3] as sufficient causes in the verse: *Lord of the east and the west, there is no god except Him, so take Him for your trustee* (73:9). And He points to kingship [114:2] as a sufficient cause in the verse: *To Him belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and to Allah all matters are returned* (57:5).

Therefore, when confronted by an impending danger, if one wants to resort to a lord, then the Almighty God is the Lord; there is none other. If one wants to resort to a king, then the Almighty God is the King in truth, for all sovereignty and rule belong to Him. And if one wants to resort to a god, then He is *the* god; there is no god other than Him.

The commands in these three verses imply an argument which can be elaborated as follows: (a) God is *the Lord of humankind…* (114:1). (b) The Prophet is one of humankind. (c) Hence, he must seek refuge with God. The same line of argument holds for the other two verses.[1]

Given the above explanations, the following points should be clear:

(1) Why these three attributes—lord, king and god—are specified amongst all of God's noble attributes.

(2) Why they are mentioned in this order. *Lord* comes first because it is closest to the human being, and signifies a personal relationship. *King* comes next because it signifies a greater distance and a more general guardianship. For instance, a person who has no guardian would come under the aegis of a king. *God* is mentioned next because a god is a guardian whom one would seek out of sincere spiritual inclination, not out of merely physical instinct.

(3) Why there is no conjunction "and" at the beginning of verses 114:-2-3. The lack of "and" indicates that each of these three qualities can be a sufficient cause for repelling harm. God is an independent

1 In other words, the divine descriptions in these verses offer a *justification* for the commands. Furthermore, the commands are not for the Prophet alone, but for *all* humankind, for God is equally their Lord, their King and their God. (Ed.)

source of support because He is a lord, because He is a king, and because He is a god. All causality belongs exclusively to Him in any of these three dimensions. We offered a similar explanation [about the lack of the conjunction "and"] above, in our exposition of: *Say, He is Allah, the One; Allah, upon whom all depend* (112:1-2).

(4) Why the word *al-nās* (humankind, people) is repeated instead of being replaced with a pronoun, such as: "their King" and "their God." This is to show that each of the three attributes is a sufficient justification on its own for one's recourse to God, with no need to mention the two others. *To Allah belong the most excellent names* (7:180), all of them.

Exegetes have offered other explanations for why these three qualities are mentioned, but there is no benefit in discussing their views.

مِنْ شَرِّ الْوَسْوَاسِ الْخَنَّاسِ ۝٤

(114:4) *from the evil of the sneaky* (al-khannās) *tempter* (al-waswās)

Majmaᶜ al-bayān says: "*Waswās* means the speaking of the voice in the mind (*ḥadīth al-nafs*) as in a whisper." Apparently it serves as an adjective here, conveying an emphasized description.[1]

Khannās is an intensified form derived from *khunūs*, which means "to hide after appearing." It is said that Satan is called *al-khannās* because he whispers temptations to people, but when they remember God, he withdraws and bides his time. Then again, when they become mindless of God, he resumes his whispering.

الَّذِي يُوَسْوِسُ فِي صُدُورِ النَّاسِ ۝٥

(114:5) *who whispers temptation into the breasts of humankind,*

This verse is an adjective for *the sneaky tempter* (114:4). *Breast* signifies the human soul, because whispering occurs in the primary locus of human

1 According to the same book, *waswās* is a *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund) much like *waswasah* (whispering, tempting). Some say it is irregular since its form should be *wiswās*, like other verbal nouns derived from four-letter roots. Some say that it is indeed an adjective, not a *maṣdar*. (Auth.)
The current translation is based on the adjective meaning. If it is taken as a *maṣdar*, the meaning would be: "I seek refuge in God from the sneaky whisperings and temptations which infiltrate the souls." (Ed.)

cognition, which is the soul. The word *breast* is used because cognition is commonly associated with the heart, and the heart is in the breast. as God says: *but the hearts turn blind—those that are in the breasts* (22:46).

مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ ۝٦

(114:6) ***from* (min)** ***among the jinn and humankind.***

The particle *min* (from, of) is *bayāniyyah* (explanatory, interpretive, descriptive).[1] This verse implies that some humans fall into the same category as the devils. God says: *devils of humankind and jinn* (6:112).

Examining Narrations

(1) Once Gabriel came to the Prophet when he was ill, and made a protective charm for him with Chapters 112-114. He [Gabriel] said: "A [protective] spell of God's name I put on you. May God heal you, from every ailment that troubles you. Take it so it may heal you." Then he recited: *In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful. Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of humankind…* (114:1-6). [2]

Author's comment: We already presented some narrations about the context of revelation of the sūrah [under the last sūrah].

(2) The Messenger of God said: Indeed Satan places his snout on the heart of Adam's children. When the heart remembers God, he withdraws; but when it forgets, he swallows it. That is *the sneaky tempter* (114:4).[3]

(3) The Messenger of God said: All believers have two ears in their heart. An angel murmurs into one ear, and *the sneaky tempter* (114:4) into another. But God fortifies the believers through the angel, as He says in: *and He strengthened them with a spirit from Him* (58:22).[4]

(4) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: When God revealed the verse, *and those who, when they commit an indecent act or wrong themselves, remember*

1 It means: "including the jinn and humankind." (Ed.)

2 *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*, on the authority of Abū Khadījah, from Imam al-Ṣādiq.

3 *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*, on the authority of Anas b. Mālik.

4 *Majmaᶜ al-bayān*, on the authority of al-ᶜAyyāshī, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Abān b. Taghlib, from Imam al-Bāqir.

Allah, and plead [Allah's] forgiveness for their sins (3:35), Iblīs climbed a mountain in Mecca called Thawr, and cried out in his loudest voice for his subordinate demons. They gathered around him and said: "Our master, why have you summoned us?"

"This verse," he explained, "has been revealed. Who can take care of it?"

One of the demons stood up and said: "I'll take care of it with this and that [strategy]."

"You're not the man[1] for it," Iblīs rejected.

Another one rose and made a similar suggestion, but Iblīs said again: "You're not the man for it."

Then *the sneaky tempter* (114:4) said: "I can take care of it."[2]

"How?" Iblīs inquired.

"I will fill them with false hopes and will tempt them with fanciful desires, until they're driven to sin. Once they have fallen into sin, I will make them oblivious of [or make them put off] asking forgiveness."

"You're the man for it," Iblīs confirmed, and put him in charge of that until the Day of Resurrection.[3]

Author's comment: Readers should refer to our discussion on Satan at the beginning of Sūrah al-Aʿrāf.[4]

By God's grace I conclude this book. The ending of this project coincided with the blessed Night of Destiny, 23 Ramadan 1392 AH (31 October 1972). All praise be to God evermore. May blessings be upon our master Muḥammad and his Household. And peace be with you. (Author)

1 The word "man" is used figuratively in the translation to highlight the symbolic nature of such narrations. (Ed.)

2 This suggests that al-Waswās al-Khannās is a proper noun, not an adjective. However, given the nature and context of the hadith, it can be a descriptive reference to a demonic tendency to fall for instant gratifications and to procrastinate repentance. (Ed.)

3 Ṣadūq's *al-Amālī*, via its a chain of narration.

4 See volume 15, pp. 48ff of the English translation, under verses 7:10-25. (Ed.)

The final review of this volume was completed on 8 June 2020. We ask God to help us complete the translation of the remaining earlier volumes. And we are ever grateful to Him for filling our lives with this noble project.

Who am I to be found in your mind and sound?
May I be crowned with the dust of your ground.
So gracious you are, and never have you frowned.

Who was your teacher of grace, my queen?
To this servant of yours, so gentle you've been;
Unmatched you are, with kindness abound.

O bird of divine, to you I resort;
I'm just setting out, and need your support;
The journey is long, and the path is unbound.

O morning breeze, to my beloved convey:
"I'm a servant of yours, so at dawn when you pray,
Let me be remembered in your prayer's background."

I yearn for the day when I leave from
This stage toward you, so my friends have to come
To *your* neighborhood if I'm to be found.

The pearl of union, O Ḥāfiẓ, appears
When your eyes become an ocean of tears;
It's worthy to dive in, and it's worthy to be drowned.

Tell the king of the sea who lives in the south,
To send a shipment of pearls to fill up my mouth,
For my verses are universal, exalted and profound.[1]

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1 Ḥāfiẓ, *ghazal* 328. (Ed.)